

THE
L I F E
O F
V O L T A I R E,



BY THE
MARQUIS DE CONDORCET.

To which are added,

MEMOIRS OF VOLTAIRE,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

V O L. I

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THE
L I F E
OF
V O L T A I R E.

THE life of Voltaire should necessarily be the history of the progress of the arts as promoted by his genius, of the power which he exercised over the opinions of his age, and of the long war which in his youth he declared against prejudice, and which he maintained to the day of his death.

VOL. I.

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When the influence of a philosopher extends itself to the multitude, when it is sudden and felt at each instant of his life, he is indebted for this influence to his character, to his mode of observation, and to his conduct, as much as to his works. Every circumstance relating to such a man promotes the study of the human mind; with which we cannot hope to become acquainted if we do not observe its properties as they exist in those to whom Nature has been prodigal of her riches and her power, and if we do not seek in such minds what they possess in common with others, and in what they are distinguished. Man is in general indebted for his opinions, and
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even for his passions, and his character, to those by whom he is surrounded; he derives them from the laws, the prejudices of his country, as the plant receives nutriment from the soil and the elements. When we contemplate the vulgar mind, we discover the power to which we are subjected by Nature, (or habit); but not the secret of internal strength, nor the laws of the human understanding.

François Marie Aronet, who by assuming the name of Voltaire has rendered it so famous, was born at Chate-nay, on the 20th of February, 1694, and was baptized at Paris, in the church

of St. André-des-Arcs, on the 22d of November in the same year. His excessive weakness was the cause of this delay, which, during life, occasioned doubts concerning the place and time of his birth. Fontenelle, in like manner, was obliged to be privately baptized, because his life was despaired of, from the feebleness of his infancy. It is somewhat singular that these two men, both so famous in this age, whose lives and understandings were each of such long duration, should mutually be born languid and feeble.

The father of M. de Voltaire exercised the office of treasurer to the chamber

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ber of accounts ; his mother, *Marguerite d'Aumart*, was of a noble family of Poitou. Their son has been reproached for having taken the name of Voltaire : that is, for having followed a custom at that time generally practised by the rich citizens and younger sons, who, leaving the family name to the heir, assumed that of a fief, or perhaps of a country house. His birth was questioned in numerous libels. His enemies, among men of literature, seemed to fear that the fashionable world would too readily sacrifice its prejudices to the pleasure found in his society, and the admiration his talents inspired, and that a man of letters should be treated with too much

equality. Such reproaches did him honour; malignity does not attack the birth of a man of literature, but from a secret consciousness, which it cannot stifle, that it is wholly unable to diminish his personal fame.

The fortune which M. Arouet the father enjoyed was doubly advantageous to his son; it procured him the advantages of education, without which genius never attains those heights to which it might otherwise arise. If we examine modern history, we shall find that all men of the first order, all those whose works have approached perfection, had not to repair the defects of education.

Nor

Nor was the advantage of being born to an independent fortune less inestimable. M. de Voltaire never felt the misery of being obliged to abandon his liberty that he might procure subsistence; to subject his genius to labour, which the necessity of living enforced; nor to flatter the prejudices, or the passions, of a patron. His mind was not enslaved by such habitual fears, which not only impede invention, but impress the character of incertitude and feebleness on every effort of the imagination. His youth, undisturbed by the doubts and fears of poverty, did not expose him to the danger of contracting that servile timidity which inspires the weak mind with habi-

tual dependence ; or that acrid, restless, and suspicious irritability which is an infallible consequence to the man of genius, when contending between that dependence to which he is by necessity subjected, and that freedom which the sublime thoughts by which he is occupied demand.

The young Arouet was sent to the Jesuits college, where the sons of the first nobility, except those of the Janse-
nists, received their education. The Jan-
senists, who were hated at court, were
feldom seen among men who, being at
that time obliged by custom to chuse a
religion which they did not understand,
naturally

naturally adopted that which best could promote their temporal interest. The professors of rhetoric, under whom he was placed, were Father Porée and Father Jay: the first, being a man of understanding, and of a good heart, discovered the seeds of a future greatness in his scholar; and the latter, struck with the boldness of his opinions and the independence of his mind, predicted that he would become the apostle of deism in France; both of which prophecies were verified by time.

When he left college, he again found the Abbé de Châteauneuf, his god-father and the friend of his mother, an intimate

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at home. The Abbé was one of those men who, having entered into the ecclesiastic estate from complaisance, or from momentary ambition not native to their mind, afterwards sacrifice fortune and sacerdotal dignities to the love of living at large, being unable continually to wear the mask of hypocrisy.

The Abbé de Chateauneuf was intimate with Ninon de l' Enclos, whom, for her probity, her understanding, and her freedom of thought, he long had pardoned in despite of the somewhat notorious adventures of her youth. The fashionable world were pleased that she had refused the invitation of her former friend,

friend, Madame de Maintenon, who had offered to invite her to court, on condition that she would become a devotee. The Abbé de Chateauneuf had presented Voltaire to Ninon. Though but a boy, he already was a poet ; already began to teize his Jansenist brother by his trifling epigrams, and to please himself with reciting the *Moïfade* of Rousseau.

Ninon had taken delight in the pupil of her friend, and had left him by will 2000 livres (about 80 guineas) to purchase books. Thus was he taught, by fortunate circumstances, even in infancy and before his understanding was formed,

ed, to regard study and labours of the mind as pleasing and honourable employments ; thus did he learn, by the society of people superior to vulgar opinions, that the mind of man is born free, and that he has a right to judge whatever he can comprehend ; while, by a cowardly condescension to prejudice, the common course of education presents nothing to childhood but the disgraceful marks of servitude.

Hypocrisy and intolerance were predominant at the court of Louis the XIVth. which was much more seriously occupied in effecting the ruin of
Janfenism

Janfenism than in relieving the fufferings of the people. The report of his incredulity had occafioned Catinat to lofe the confidence which was due to his virtues and his abilities for war. De Vendôme was reproached with occafionally neglecting mafs; and the fuccefs of the heretick Marlborough, and the infidel Eugene, was attributed to his want of devotion. This hypocrify had difgusted thofe whom it could not corrupt; and, in averfion to the austerities of Verfailles, the moft fashionable focieties of Paris affected to carry their liberty and the love of pleafure even to licentiousnefs.

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The Abbé de Chateauneuf introduced the young Voltaire to these societies, and particularly to the company of the Duke de Sully, the Marquis de la Fare, the Abbé Servien, the Abbé de Chaulieu, and the Abbé Courtin; who were often joined by the Prince de Conti, and the grand Prior de Vendôme.

M. Arbuét imagined his son was ruined, when he was told that he wrote poetry and frequented the society of people of fashion. He wished to make him a judge, and saw him employed on a tragedy. This family quarrel ended by sending the young Voltaire to the

Marquis

Marquis de Chateauneuf, the French ambassador in Holland.

His exile was not of long duration. Madame du Noyer, who had fled thither with her two daughters rather to avoid her husband than from zeal for the protestant religion, was then at the Hague, where she lived by intrigues and libels, and proved from her conduct that she did not go thither in search of liberty of conscience.

M. de Voltaire became enamoured of one of her daughters; and the mother, finding that the only advantage she could gain from his attachment was that of making

making it public, carried her complaints to the ambassador, who forbade his young dependent to continue his visits to Mademoiselle du Noyer; and sent him back to his family for having disobeyed his orders.

Madame du Noyer failed not to print this story with the Letters of the young Arouet to her daughter, hoping that this already well known name would promote the sale of her book; and vaunted of her maternal severity and delicacy in the very libel in which she proclaimed her daughter's dishonour.

The fine feelings of the author of *Zaire* and *Tancrede* are not discoverable
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in these letters. The sensations of impassioned youth are strong, but their gradations it is unable to distinguish; it neither can select those strong and rapid traits which characterise passion, nor find terms which paint its feelings to the imagination, and infuse them into the soul of the reader; while devoured by love, the most sincere and the most ardent, it is apparently dull, cold, or extravagant. The talent of painting the passions for the theatre appears to be one of the last which discovers itself in poets. Racine had given no tokens of it either in *Les Frères Ennemis*, or in *Alexandre*; and Brutus preceded *Zaïre*. Not only, must the passions have been

felt before they can be described, but their emotions and effects must have been remarked when they have ceased to lord it over the mind, and when they exist only in the recollection. The heart is sufficient to make us sensible of their existence; but, to express them with energy and truth, the soul must have long been under their influence, and experience must have been improved by reflection.

The youth, when returned to Paris, soon forgot his love; but he did not forget to use every effort that he might wrest a young and estimable woman, who was natively virtuous, from a corrupt

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rupt and intriguing mother. He employed the zeal of Proselytism*. He was aided by several bishops, and even jesuits. The project failed, but Voltaire had afterward the good fortune to be of service to Mademoiselle du Noyer, when she had married the Baron de Vinterfeld.

His father, however, finding him persist in writing poetry, and living at large, forbade him his house. The most submissive letters made no impression on him; the son even asked permission to go to America, provided that before his

* *Il employa le zèle du Prosélytisme*; the meaning, I imagine, is, that he made her a convert from the protestant to the catholick faith.

departure he might but be permitted to kneel at his feet; but there was no choice, he must determine not to depart for America, but to bind himself to an attorney. He did not here remain long; M. de Caumartin, the friend of M. Arouet, pitied the fate of his son, and requested permission to take him to St. Ange; where, removed from those societies which alarmed paternal affection, he might reflect on, and make choice of a profession. Here he met with Caumartin, the elder, a respectable old man, who was passionately fond of Henry the IVth, and Sully, at that time too much forgotten by the nation. Caumartin had been intimate with the best informed

men

men of the reign of Louis the XIVth and was acquainted with the most secret anecdotes, such as they really happened. These he took a pleasure to recount, and Voltaire returned from St. Ange, occupied by the project of writing an epic poem, of which Henry the IVth should be the hero, and ardently desirous of studying the History of France. To this journey are we indebted for the *Henriade*, and the age of Louis XIV.

The death of this monarch was recent; the people, of whom he long had been the idol, the very people who had pardoned his profusion, his wars, and his despotism, and had applauded his

persecution of the protestants, insulted his memory by testifying indecent joy. A bull, obtained from Rome against a book of devotion, had occasioned the Parisians to forget that glory of which they so long had been enamoured. Satires on the memory of Louis the Great were as numerous as eulogies had been during his life. Voltaire being accused of having written one of these satires, was sent to the bastille. The poem ended with the following line :

J'ai vu ces maux, et je n'ai pas vingt ans.*

Voltaire was then upwards of two and twenty, and the police took this confor-

* These evils have I seen, yet have not reached my twentieth year.

mity of age to be proof sufficient to deprive him of his liberty.

It was in the baſtile that the young poet ſketched his poem of the League, corrected his tragedy of Oedipus, which he had begun long before, and wrote ſome merry verſes on the miſfortune of being there a priſoner. The regent Duke of Orleans, being informed of his innocence, reſtored him to freedom, and granted him a recompenſe.

“ I thank your royal highneſs,” ſaid Voltaire, “ for having provided me with food ; but I hope you will not, hereafter, trouble yourſelf concerning my lodging.”

The tragedy of Oedipus was performed in 1718. The author had hitherto been known only by his fugitive pieces, by some epistles which breathed the spirit of Chaulieu, but written more correctly, and by an ode which had vainly contended for the prize bestowed by the French academy; to this a ridiculous piece written by the Abbé du Jarri had been preferred. The theme proposed by the academy was the decoration of the altar of Notre Dame; for Louis the XIVth, after having reigned seventy years, recollected it was time to perform the promise of Louis the XIIIth. Thus was the subject of the first serious poem, written by Voltaire, devotion. Possessed
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of native and unerring taste, he would not mingle the passion of love with a tale so horrid as that of Oedipus; and had been daring enough to present his piece to the theatre without having paid this tribute to custom. But it was rejected. The assembled comedians took it amiss that the author should dare to dispute their judgment. "The young man well deserves," said Dufresne, "as a punishment for his pride, that his tragedy should be played with the long vile scene which he has translated from Sophocles."

Voltaire was obliged to cede, and to insert a whole episode of love. The piece was applauded, though in despite
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of the episode ; and the long vile scene from Sophocles insured its success. La Motte, who was at that time the first among men of letters, said in his approbation that this tragedy gave promise of a worthy successor to Corneille and Racine ; and the homage thus rendered by a rival, whose fame was established, and who had reason to fear he might see himself surpassed, must for ever do honour to the character of La Motte.

But Voltaire, proclaimed a man of genius and a philosopher to a croud of inferior authors and fanatics of all sects, even then gained a combination of enemies, whom the rising generations of
sixty

sixty years have continued to supply, and who often have molested his long and glorious career. The following celebrated lines—

*Nos Prêtres ne sont pas ce qu'un vain peuple
pense ;
Notre Crédulité fait toute leur Science*.*

were the first signal of a war, which not even the death of Voltaire could extinguish.

At one of the representations of Oedipus, Voltaire appeared on the stage, bearing up the train of the high priest. The Marchioness de Villars asked who

* Our priests are not what the foolish people suppose ; their whole knowledge is derived from our credulity.

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was that young man who wished the piece might be condemned; she was told it was the author. This thoughtless act, which spoke a man so superior to the trifling anxieties of self-love, made the marchioness desirous of his acquaintance. Voltaire, being admitted her visitor, conceived a passion for her, the first, and the most serious he ever felt. He was unsuccessful; and was for a considerable time diverted from study, which had already become necessary to his existence. He never, afterwards, mentioned this subject but with a sensation of regret, and almost of remorse.

Having

Having freed himself from his passion, he continued the *Henriade*; and wrote the tragedy of *Artémire*. An actress, whom he had formed, and who was at once his mistress and his pupil, played the principal character. The public, who had done justice to *Oedipus*, was (to say the least) severe to *Artémire*. This is a common consequence of success; nor is secret aversion for acknowledged superiority the only cause, though this aversion has the art to profit by a natural feeling which renders us more difficult to be pleased in proportion as we have more to hope.

This

This tragedy was of no other value to Voltaire than that of obtaining permission for him to return to Paris, whence he had been banished by his intimacy with the enemies of the regent, and among others with the Duke de Richelieu and the famous Baron de Gortz. Thus did this ambitious man, whose vast projects included all Europe, and threatened to overturn its governments, chuse a young poet for his friend and almost for his confident. Men of genius seek for, and at once know each other; they have a common language, which they alone can speak and understand.

In

In 1722, Voltaire accompanied Madame de Rupelmonde into Holland. He was desirous, at Brussels, of being acquainted with Rousseau, whose misfortunes he pitied, and whose poetic talent he esteemed. The love of his art was too powerful for that just contempt which he ought to have conceived for the character of Rousseau. Voltaire consulted him on his Poem on the League ; and read his Epistle to Urania to him, written for Madame de Rupelmonde. This poem was the first monument of his freedom of thinking, and of his talent of treating on moral and metaphysical subjects in verse, and of rendering them popular.

Rousseau,

Rousseau, on his part, read an Ode addressed to Posterity, which Voltaire, as it is pretended, then told him would never arrive at the place to which it was addressed. He likewise read the Judgment of Pluto, which was as quickly forgotten as the ode. The two poets parted irreconcilable foes. Rousseau violently attacked Voltaire, who continued patiently to suffer during fifteen years. It is astonishing to think that the author of so many licentious epigrams, in which the clergy were continually made the subject of ridicule and opprobrium, should seriously assign the thoughtless behaviour of Voltaire during *mas*s and his Epistle to Urania as the cause
of

of his hatred. But Rousseau had assumed the mask of devotion, which was then an honourable asylum for such as had suffered in the world's opinion: a safe and commodious asylum which philosophy, among the other evils of which it is accused, has unfortunately, for hypocrites, eternally closed.

In 1724, Voltaire presented the world with *Mariamne*, which was but *Artémire* under new names, but with a less complicated and less romantic fable. It was written in the very style of Racine, and was forty times performed. In his preface, the author opposed the opinion of La Motte who, possessed of much un-

derstanding and reason, but little sensible of the charms of harmony, discovered no other merit in versification than that of difficulties overcome; nor any thing more than a formal custom, in poetry, invented to ease the memory, and to which habit alone had attributed charms. In his letters, printed at the end of Oedipus, he had before combatted the opinions of the same poet, who regarded the observance of the three Unities as another prejudice.

We ought to think ourselves obliged to those who, like La Motte, dare to oppose common and received opinions. In order to defend ancient rules, they
must

must necessarily be examined; and if received opinions, on examination, be found true, we enjoy the advantage of believing that from reason to which we had previously given our assent from habit; if false, the world is then freed from an error.

It is no uncommon thing, however, for men to be angry at those who oblige them to scrutinize what had been admitted upon trust. The minds, which, like that of Montaigne, quietly slumber on the pillow of scepticism, are not common; and still less common are those who are tormented by the desire of discovering truth. The vulgar love to

believe without proof; and to cherish their security in blind faith, as a thing necessary to their ease and safety.

About the same time, the *Henriade* appeared under the name of the League: an imperfect copy, stole from the author, was clandestinely printed, in which there were not only parts omitted, but some vacancies were supplied.

Thus France was at length possessed of an Epic Poem. It must be regretted, no doubt, that Voltaire, the fables of whose tragedies are so full of action, who has made the passions speak a language so natural and so true, and who
could

could paint them so effectually as well by analyzing their sentiments as by their sudden ebullitions, should not have displayed in the *Henriade* those talents which never before were combined in the same man to so great a degree. Yet, a subject so well known and so recent gave but little room for the imagination of the poet. The gloomy and persecuting spirit of fanaticism, exercising itself on subaltern characters, could excite little more than horror. The chiefs of the league were animated by an ambition which hypocrisy debased. The hero of the poem, gallant, brave, and humane, but continually subject to misfortune which alighted on him alone,

could interest only by his courage and his clemency. Nor was it possible that the unnatural conversion of Henry the IVth should form an heroic catastrophe.

But though the *Henriade* in pathos, variety, and action, be inferior to those epic poems which were then in possession of universal admiration, yet by how many new beauties was this inferiority compensated? Never was philosophy, so profound and so true, embellished by verses more sublime or more affecting. What other poem presents to us characters drawn with greater strength and dignity, and without offence to historical

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cal fact ? What other contains morality more pure, humanity more enlightened, or is more free from the errors of prejudice and vulgar passion ? Whether the poet causes his characters to act or speak, whether he paints the crimes of fanaticism, or the charms and the dangers of love, whether he transports his hearer to the field of battle, or into that heaven which he himself created, he is every where a philosopher, and is every where deeply intent on promoting the true interests of the human race. In the very palace of fiction, we behold truth sublimely rise, and always painted in the most splendid and purest colours.

Of all epic poems, the *Henriade* alone has a moral purport; not that it can be said to be the developement of one single truth, which is a pedantic idea and to which a poet cannot subject himself, but because it breathes throughout a detestation of war and fanaticism, and a spirit of toleration and humanity. Each poem necessarily wears the complexion of the age in which it took birth; and the birth of the *Henriade* was in the age of reason. Hence, the greater the progress of reason among mankind the greater will be their admiration of this poem.

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The *Henriade* may be compared to the *Æneid*: both bear the stamp of genius in whatever depended on the poet, and the defects of both are in the choice of the subject, which was mutually dictated by a national spirit. Virgil, however, intended only to flatter Roman pride; but Voltaire had the more noble motive of preserving the French from fanaticism, by a recapitulation of the crimes into which their ancestors had been hurried.

The *Henriade*, *Oedipus*, and *Mariamne* had placed Voltaire much above his contemporaries; and seemed to secure a life of fame, when his repose was troubled

troubled by a fatal accident. He had returned a satirical answer to some contemptuous words which had been spoken by a courtier, who revenged himself by causing Voltaire to be insulted by his servants without endangering his personal safety. The outrage was committed at the gate of the Hotel de Sully, where he had dined; nor did the Duke de Sully deign to shew any resentment; being, no doubt, persuaded that the descendants of the Franks had preserved the right of life and death over the Gauls. Justice remained mute; the parliament of Paris, which had caused far less misdemeanours to be punished when committed against one of its own subalterns,

subalterns, imagined nothing was due to an undignified citizen, although the greatest man of literature the nation possessed, and kept silence.

Voltaire was desirous of taking those means to revenge offended honour which the manners of modern nations have authorised, but which their laws have proscribed. The Bastile, and, at the end of six months, an order to quit Paris were the punishment of his first step. The Cardinal de Fleury had not so much policy as even to denote the slightest mark of dissatisfaction against the aggressor. Thus when men are unprotected by the laws they are punished by arbitrary

arbitrary power for seeking that revenge, which the want of protection renders legal, and which is prescribed as necessary to the principles of honour. We venture to believe that the rights of man will be more respected in our times, that the laws will not remain impotent from any ridiculous prejudice of birth, and that when any quarrel shall happen between two citizens no minister will deprive him who received the first offence of his freedom.

Voltaire made a secret journey to Paris, but to no effect. He there met with more than one adversary, who disposed at pleasure of judicial power
and

and ministerial authority, and who could safely effect his ruin. He buried himself in retirement, and disdained longer to seek revenge; or, rather, revenged himself by overwhelming his enemy with the weight of his increasing fame, and forcing him to hear the name which he wished to degrade incessantly repeated with acclamation throughout all Europe.

England was his place of refuge. Newton was no more; but his spirit was infused into his countrymen, whom he had taught to trust to experiment, and calculation only in the study of nature. Locke, whose death was likewise recent,

had

had been the first to give the theory of the human understanding founded on experience, and to shew the path which may safely be followed in metaphysical pursuits. The philosophy of Shaftesbury, commented on by Bolingbroke, and embellished by the versification of Pope, had given birth in England to that deism which announced morality, founded on motives such as might affect great minds without offence to reason.

In France, mean time, the men of most understanding were labouring to substitute in our schools the hypothesis of Des Cartes, for the absurdities of scholastick philosophy. Any thesis, in which
either

either the system of Copernicus or that of the Vortices was maintained, was a victory over prejudice. Innate ideas, in the eyes of the devout, were become almost an article of faith; though they had at first been supposed heretical. Malebranche, whom men imagined they understood, was the philosopher in fashion. He was supposed a free-thinker, who allowed himself to regard the existence of the five propositions, in the unintelligible Book of Janfenius, as a thing in which the happiness of the human race was not concerned, or who had the temerity to read Bayle without the permission of a doctor in divinity.

This

This contrast could not but excite the enthusiasm of a man, who, like Voltaire, had from his infancy shaken off prejudice. The example of England shewed him that truth was not formed to remain in secret among a few philosophers, and men of the world, the pupils of these philosophers; who laughed with them at those errors of which the people are the victims, but became themselves the defenders of error, when their office or their rank made it their interest, supposed or real, and were ready to proscribe or even to persecute their preceptors should they venture to speak what they themselves privately believed.

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From this moment, Voltaire felt himself called to be the destroyer of prejudice of every kind, of which his country was the slave. He felt the possibility of succeeding by a happy mixture of boldness and pliability, by knowing when to recede and when to advance, by artfully and alternately employing reason, ridicule, the charms of poetry, and theatrical effect, and by simplifying truth so as to render it popular, amiable, and fashionable, without offence to frivolity. This good project, of rendering himself, by the force of his own genius, the benefactor of a whole nation, whence he meant to banish error, fired the mind of Voltaire, and inspired him with forti-

tude. He swore to this to consecrate his life; and he kept his vow.

The tragedy of Brutus was the first fruits of his journey to England.

The French theatre had not, since Cinna, breathed the haughty accents of freedom; and they had, there, been smothered by those of revenge. In Brutus, the strength of Corneille was discovered with additional pomp and splendor, combined with that simplicity which Corneille wanted, and the uniform elegance of Racine. Never were the rights of an oppressed people displayed

played with greater power, eloquence, and even precision, than in the second scene of Brutus. The fifth act is equally remarkable for its pathos. The poet has been reproached for having made love a part of a subject so awful and terrible, and particularly love, which is deficient in interest; but, had the motive of Titus been any other than love, he would have been debased, the severity of Brutus would not then have rent the hearts of the spectators; and, had love been rendered too pathetic, it would have been to be feared that love would have destroyed the cause of liberty. It was after this piece had been acted that Fontenelle told Voltaire “He did not

think his genius proper for tragedy, and that his style was too bold, pompous, and splendid."—"If so," replied Voltaire, "I will go and read your pastorals."

He supposed, at this time, he might aspire to a place in the French academy; and he might well have been thought modest to have waited so long. But he had not so much as the honour of dividing the votes of the academicians. The fat De Bosc pronounced in a dictatorial tone, that Voltaire should never be one of their dignified members.

This De Bosc, whose name is now forgotten, was one of these men, who,

with little mind, and not too much knowledge, obtain admission among men of rank and power, and succeed precisely because they neither have the wit to inspire fear, nor to humble the self-love of those who seek the reputation of patronising men of letters. De Boscé was become a person of importance. He exercised the office of inspector of new publications; which is an usurpation on the part of the magistrate, over men of letters, to whom the avidity of the rich and the powerful have left no employments but those whose execution requires the exertion of knowledge and talents.

After Brutus, Voltaire wrote the death of Cæsar; a subject which had previously been chosen by Shakspeare, some scenes of whom he imitated and embellished. The tragedy was not played till several years had elapsed, and then in a college; he durst not risk a piece on the stage, destitute of love and of women, and which was likewise a tragedy in three acts: for it is not the most trifling innovations which excite the least clamour among the enemies of novelty; little things necessarily impress themselves on little minds. Still, however, a bold, noble, and figurative, yet natural, style, sentiments worthy of the conqueror of the
freest

freest people on earth, and that force and grandeur of character, and deep thought which pervade the language of these last Romans, could not but be felt by spectators capable of discovering such merit, and men whose hearts and minds were related to these great personages, as well as by those who might love history, and such young minds as in the course of education had lately been occupied by similar objects.

Historical tragedies, such as *Cinna*, the death of Pompey, *Brutus*, *Rome Preserved*, and the *Triumvirate*, of Voltaire, cannot be equally interesting with the *Cid*, *Iphigene*, *Zaïre*, or *Merope*.

The mild and tender passions cannot display themselves in conformity with historical fact; incidents cannot be so selected and disposed as to produce theatrical effect with equal success; the poet has not the same power over the characters; the general interest, which is that of a people, or of a state rather than of an individual, is rendered less forcible, because it is dependent on sentiments less energetic.

But, far from stigmatizing this species of writing, as the coldest and most unfavourable to dramatic genius, it ought to be encouraged; because it opens a vast field for the poet, in which he may
unfold

unfold all the sublime truths of politics; because it displays grand historical pictures; and because, by these means, the soul may most effectually be formed and elevated. We, doubtless, ought to place these among the first of poems which, like *Mahomet* and *Alzire*, are at once extensive, and abounding with pathos and terror. But these are uncommon subjects, and require the exertion of talents, which no poet but Voltaire has hitherto possessed.

The *Death of Cæsar* was not allowed to be printed: the republican sentiments it contained were attributed as crimes to the author. This was a ridiculous imputation ;

tation; each character spoke his own language; and Brutus was not more the hero than Cæsar; the poet, treating an historical subject, drew his portraits after history, with strict impartiality. But, under the government of the Cardinal de Fleury, which was at once tyrannical and pusillanimous, the language of slavery alone could appear to be innocent.

Who could, at present, suppose that the eulogy on the death of Mademoiselle le Couvreur could have been made a subject of serious persecution, and have obliged Voltaire to quit the metropolis, where he knew that absence would fortunately

unately cause all things to be forgotten, and even the frenzy of persecution?

The theatre is truly a useful institution, at which even indolent and frivolous youth preserve something of the habit of feeling and of thinking, while moral ideas are not totally lost to their minds, and the pleasures of the imagination are still felt to exist. The sensations which the representation of a tragedy excite purify the soul, and raise it from that apathy and egotism which are the maladies to which the dissipated are, in the nature of things, condemned. Such exhibitions form a kind of connection between the two classes of men who do,
and

could not pardon him for having proclaimed their unworthy cowardice.

Voltaire felt that some great theatrical success could alone secure him the hearts of the public, and shield him from the attacks of fanaticism. In a country in which no popular power exists, each class has some point at which to rally and forms itself into a species of power. A dramatic author is under the protection of those societies who resort to the theatre for amusement. The public, by applauding allusions, flatter or offend the vanity of men in office, discourage or re-animate their opponents, and cannot for this reason be openly defied

defied. Voltaire, therefore, presented his *Euriphile*, which did not effect his purpose; but, far from being discouraged by want of success, and delighted with the subject of *Zaïre*, he finished that tragedy in eighteen days, and it made its appearance on the stage four months after *Euriphile*.

Its success surpassed his hopes. This was the first piece in which, forsaking the tract of Corneille and Racine, he discovered art, style, and talents entirely his own. Never did love more true or more impassioned draw tears more sweet; never did poet before so depict the fury of jealousy in a mind so simple,

so affectionate, and so generous. We love Orofmanes at the very moment he makes us shudder. He sacrifices Zaïre, the affecting, the lovely, the virtuous Zaïre, yet we cannot hate him. And even, were it possible to forget Orofmanes and Zaïre, how awful is irreligion in the person of the aged Lusignan? How noble is the spirit of fanaticism, which the reproaches of Narestam breathe? With what art has the poet painted the Christians whose interference disturb so sweet a union, a feeling and pious woman who has sacrificed her life and her love to her God, while the man who believes not in Christianity weeps for Zaïre, whose mind is distracted by

filial

filial affection, and who is the willing victim of a superstitious prejudice which forbids her to love a man of a different sect. This is the master-piece of art. Whoever does not believe in the Old Testament, discovers in *Athalie* nothing but the school of bigotry, falsehood, and murder; but to all sects, and in all countries, *Zaïre* is the tragedy of the feeling and the innocent heart.

This tragedy was followed by that of *Adelaide de Guesclin*, which had likewise love for its subject, and in which, as in *Zaïre*, French heroes and French history were recited in beauti-

ful poetry, so as to increase the interest. But it was the patriotism of a citizen who delighted in the recollection of respected names and great events, and not the *patriotism of the anti-chamber* which has since been so applauded on the French theatre.

Adelaide failed of success. A wit, when Mariamne was acting, prevented it being heard to the end by calling from the pit, *The queen drinks*. Another occasioned Adelaide to be condemned by answering *Coussi, coussi**, to the noble and affecting question of Vendome, *Es tu content Couci†?*

* So, so. † Art thou satisfied, Couci?

This same piece was again acted under the title of the Duke de Foix, after having been corrected, not in conformity to the judgment of the author but of his critics, and was more successful. But when, long after, the philosopher's three blows of the hammer had unknowingly taught the audience not to hiss when the canon was fired* in Adelaide, at a time when the play was again acted in despite of Voltaire, who had less recollection of the beauties of his piece than of the wounds which criti-

* The text is, *Lorsque les trois coups de marteau du philosophe, sans le savoir, eurent appris qu'on ne sifflerait plus le coup de canon d'Adelaide, &c.* The translator imagines there is an allusion here to some (perhaps well known) passage or incident, of which he thinks it his duty ingenuously to confess his ignorance.

cism had inflicted, it met with the most unbounded applause. The character of Vendome, as amorous as that of Orosmanes, was then felt in all its force. The one, jealous in consequence of an imperious temper, the other, from an excess of love; the first, tyrannical from native impetuosity and pride, and the second, from the unfortunate habits attending on despotic power. Tender and disinterested in his affection, Orosmanes renders himself guilty during that momentary frenzy into which he is hurried by excusable error, and punishes by sacrificing himself. Vendome, more personal and rather the slave of his passion than of his mistress, protects

protects his crime with a more tranquil fury, but expiates it by his remorse and the sacrifice of his love. The one exhibits those excesses and sufferings into which the violence of despair plunges the generous soul ; and the other, the power of repentant virtue over the strong mind, which had previously abandoned itself to passion.

It is said that the success of Adelaide was injured by the Temple of Taste, in which charming work Voltaire had passed sentence on the writers of the past age, and even on some of his contemporaries. Time has confirmed all his decisions, which each then appeared

sacrilegious. In observing such literary intolerance, the necessity, under which every writer labours who wishes to live in peace, of respecting opinions already formed of the merit of an orator or a poet, and the fury with which the public pursues those who dare even on the most indifferent subjects to think differently from themselves, we should be tempted to imagine that man is intolerant by Nature. Wit, reason, and genius cannot always guard us against this misfortune. There are few men who have not some secret idols, the worship of which they cannot calmly see destroyed,

Pride

Pride and envy is frequently the origin of this sensation. The writer who, criticising those whom we admire, assumes an air of superiority over them and consequently over ourselves, we regard as one that affects an offensive pre-eminence. We fear, while pulling down the statue of the man who is no more, he means to substitute that of a living favourite, whose fame fails not to afflict mediocrity. But when strong minds yield to this kind of intolerance, this temporary and excusable weakness, the offspring of indolence and habit, they soon again cede to the force of truth, and are neither guilty of injustice nor persecution.

Voltaire had, in his retirement, conceived the happy plan of bringing his nation acquainted with the philosophy, the literature, the opinions, and the sects of England ; to effect which, he wrote his Letters on the English Nation. Newton whose philosophic opinions, whose system of the earth, and whose optical experiments were scarcely known in France ; Locke whose Essay on the Human Understanding; translated into French, had only been read by a few philosophers ; Bacon the extent of whose fame was that he had been lord chancellor ; Shakspeare whose genius and gross errors form a phœnomenon in the history of literature ;

Congreve,

Congreve, Wicherly, Addifon, and Pope whose names were almost unknown even by our men of letters ; the bigotted Quakers who, without being persecutors, were fanaticks in their devotion, yet the most rational of Christians in their creed and in their morals, ridiculous in the eyes of the world, for having carried two virtues to excess; the love of peace and the love of equality ; the other sects by which England was divided ; the influence which a general spirit of freedom had there obtained over literature, philosophy, arts, opinions, and manners ; and the practice of inoculation which had been examined without prejudice and met with

with few impediments, notwithstanding the singularity and the innovation of the practice : such were the principal subjects of his work.

Fontenelle was the first who made reason and philosophy speak an agreeable and inviting language : he had the art to mingle reflexions, sage, delicate, and frequently profound, with the sciences. In the Letters of Voltaire we discover the merit of Fontenelle, with more taste, simplicity, boldness, and gaiety. No rooted attachment to the errors of Des Cartes interfered, to spread a shade over, and to disfigure, truth. He possessed the logic

gic and pleasantry of the *Lettres Provinciales**, but exercised them on greater subjects; nor were they injured by a varnish of monkish devotion.

This work was the æra of a revolution in France; it gave rise to a taste for philosophy, and English literature; it interested us in the manners, policy, and commercial knowledge of that nation; and it brought us acquainted with the English language. A puerile partiality afterward took place of former indifference; and, by a remarkable singularity, Voltaire had the glory of combating it, and of diminishing its

* By Pascal.

influence.

influence. He had taught us to feel the merit of Shakspeare, and to regard his works as a mine, whence treasures might be dug by our poets ; and, when a ridiculous enthusiasm presented this eloquent, but wild and capricious poet, as a model to a nation possessed of Racine and Voltaire, and wished us to consider his canvass, overcharged with absurdity and gross caricature, as the energetic and true pictures of nature, Voltaire defended the cause of taste and reason. He had first exclaimed against the too great timidity of our theatre, and was afterward obliged to exclaim against our inclination to imitate

tate the licentious barbarity of the English stage.

The publication of these letters excited persecution, the bitterness of which, to read them at present, could scarcely be conceived : but innate ideas were opposed in them, and our doctors of that day believed, if there were no innate ideas, there would be no sufficiently marked characters to distinguish between the souls of men and of brutes. Beside, it was there maintained, after Locke, that there was no strict proof that God had not the power, if he had the will, to impart to matter the faculty of thinking. This was to infringe
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on the privilege of the divines, who pretended to know accurately and exactly, they and they alone, all that God has thought, and all that he could do, or has done, since, and even before, the beginning of the world.

In fine, Voltaire criticised some passages of the Thoughts of Pascal: a work which the Jesuits, in their own despite, were obliged to respect as much as the works of St. Augustin. It gave scandalous offence to see a poet, nay more a layman, dare to sit in judgment on Pascal. It appeared to be an attack on the only defender of the Christian religion, who, among the fashionable world,

world had the reputation of being a great man. It was to attack religion itself : and how much would the proofs of religion be weakened, should the mathematician, Pascal, who had openly devoted himself to its defence, be convicted of having often reasoned ill.

The clergy demanded that the Letters on the English Nation should be suppressed ; and they were so, by an arret of council. These arrets were given, without examination, as a kind of retribution, for the subsidy which government obtained from the assemblies of the clergy ; and as a reward for the facility with which they were granted.

granted. Ministers forgot that the interest of the secular power was not to support, but to suffer the progress of reason to destroy, that empire of the priesthood which has been so long and so barbarously abused; and that it is not good policy to purchase peace of an enemy, by sacrificing our defenders.

The parliament burnt the book, according to a custom formerly invented by Tiberius, and rendered ridiculous since the invention of printing. But there are certain people for whom the experience of three ages are necessary, before they can begin to perceive absurdity.

So much persecution, exercised at the very time when the miracles of the Abbé Paris and those of Father Girard were acting, loaded the two persecuting parties with ridicule and opprobrium. It was natural that they should unite, against a man who daringly preached reason; and they went so far as to order informations to be issued against the author of the Letters. The keeper of the seals banished Voltaire, who, being at that time absent, received early information, and avoided the people sent to conduct him to the place of his exile; rather choosing to combat at a distance, and where he could be in safety. His friends proved that he had

not forfeited his promise, not to publish his Letters in France; and that they had made their appearance from the treachery of a book-binder. Fortunately, the keeper of the seals had more zeal for his authority than for religion, and was much more of a minister than of a devotee. The storm was hushed, and Voltaire had permission to return to Paris.

This calm was but of momentary duration. The epistle to Urania, which, till then, had been kept in secret, was printed; and Voltaire, to escape a new persecution, was obliged to disavow and attribute it to the Abbé de

de Chaulieu, who had been dead several years. The imputation did the abbé honour as a poet, without injuring his fame as a Christian.

The necessity of falsehood, in disavowing a work, is an act of extremity, alike repugnant to conscience and to dignity of character; but the crime is in the injustice of those men who render such a disavowal necessary for the safety of the author. If that which is in itself innocent be made a crime, if absurd or arbitrary laws have infringed on the natural right, which all men possess, of not only having but publishing their opinions, we then deservedly

lose the other right of always hearing the truth, which is solely founded on freedom. We are forbidden to deceive, because to deceive any man is to commit an injury on him, or to expose him to commit one himself. But injury supposes a right; and no one has the right to seek for and secure to himself the means of doing injustice.

We do not disculpate Voltaire, for having attributed his work to the Abbé de Chaulieu, but such an imputation is in itself indifferent, and a mere act of pleasantry; it is affording an excuse to people in power who are disposed to be indulgent without daring to confess

themselves so, by the aid of which they may repel such persecutors as are over serious in their zeal.

The indiscretion with which some of the friends of Voltaire repeated fragments from his Maid of Orleans was the cause of a new persecution. The keeper of the seals threatened to confine the poet in the worst and deepest of dungeons, if any part of the poem made its appearance. Remembering the long space of time during which such subaltern tyrants, inflated by momentary power, have dared to hold similar language to men who have been the glory of their country and

their age, the sensations of contempt rise in us and smother those of indignation. The oppressor and the oppressed are now both in the grave; but the name of the oppressed will be borne, on the wings of fame, to future ages, and singly preserved from oblivion; while eternal shame will pursue the memory of his cowardly persecutors.

It was in these tempestuous times that the lieutenant of the police, Hecrault, one day said to Voltaire:—
 “Write what you will, you never can overturn the Christian religion.”—
 “We

“ We shall see that,”——replied the poet*.

At a time when there was much conversation concerning a man who had been arrested by a supposed forged *lettre de cachet*, Voltaire asked the same magistrate what punishment would be inflicted on those who should fabricate false *lettres de cachet*.——“ They will be hanged.”——“ That will be but doing right : let us hope the time will come when those who sign the true will be served in the same way.”

* See, in the general correspondence of D’Alembert, the letter of the 20th of June, 1760.

Wearied by so much persecution, Voltaire thought it necessary to change his mode of life, to effect which fortune secured him the means. Ancient philosophers have vaunted of poverty as the safe-guard of independence : Voltaire, that he might be independent, wished to become rich ; and he was equally to be commended. The ancients were unacquainted with that secret wealth which may at once be dispersed and secured, in various countries, beyond the reach of power. Confiscation and its abuses amongst them rendered wealth as dangerous as fame, or popular favour. The extent of the Roman empire, and the smallness

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ness of the Grecian republics, alike prevented men from the concealment of their riches, or their persons. The difference of manners among neighbouring nations, the almost general ignorance of foreign languages, and a less degree of intercourse throughout the world, were then so many impediments to a change of country.

The ancients likewise knew less of the conveniencies of life, which among us are become necessary to all who are not born in poverty. Their climate subjected them to less numerous real wants; and the wealthy were more addicted to magnificence, refinement in debauchery,

debauchery, excess, and caprice, than to habitual and daily convenience. Thus, as it was more easy for them to be poor, and more difficult to be rich without danger, riches were not among them, as among us, the means of escaping from unjust oppression.

Let us not blame a philosopher for having, in order to secure his independence, preferred such resources as the manners of his age supplied to those which belong to other manners and to other times.

The fortune which descended to Voltaire from his father and his brother

ther was ample, and had been increased by the London edition of the *Henriade*, and fortunate speculations in the public funds. Thus, to the advantage of possessing wealth, which ascertained independence, he added that of being indebted for it to himself. The use he made of riches might prevail on envy itself to pardon him their acquirement.

Much of his wealth was expended in aiding men of letters, and in encouraging such youth as he thought discovered the seeds of genius. This, in particular, was the application he made of the trifling profits he derived
from

from his works and his theatrical productions, when he did not make a free gift of the latter to the comedians. Yet never was author more cruelly accused of injuries done to his bookfellers; but the whole swarm of literary insects were at their command, and were themselves anxious to decry the conduct of a man whose works they were conscious they could not bring into disrepute. The pride of mediocrity, the vanity of men, even of merit, wounded by a too incontestible superiority, the busy world ever anxious to degrade knowledge and talents which are the objects of their secret envy, and fanaticks who were interested to calum-

calumniate Voltaire, that they might have the less to fear, all conspired to increase the detraction of bookfellers and hyper-critics. But proofs of the falshood of these imputations, as well as the favours heaped by Voltaire on some of his detractors, still subsist; nor can we remember these proofs without a sigh, at the misfortune of genius thus condemned to suffer, and at that shameful facility men have to credit whatever can relieve them from the necessity of admiring. Such sighs are the melancholy retribution of fame.

Having no more need, for the security of his fortune, to court patronage,
solicit

solicit places, or to trafic with book-fellers, Voltaire renounced all residence at the capital. Previous to the administration of Cardinal de Fleury, and his journey to England, his intercourse had been among people of the first fashion. Princes and nobles, those who were at the head of affairs, people of fashion and women most in vogue, were courted by him and were equally desirous of his company. He was every where received with pleasure and welcome, but he every where inspired envy and fear. Superior, in genius, he was even more so, in the wit of conversation, into which he infused whatever can render frivolity amiable,

amiable, and at the same time interspersed traits of a more elevated nature. Born with the talent of humour, his repartees were often repeated; nor was there any want of an application of the word malignant to what was no more than the decision of the understanding, rendered acute by native wit.

On his return from England, he felt that in society, where men assemble from motives of vanity and self-love, he should meet but with few friends. He therefore, though he did not quarrel with such societies, frequented them less. The taste he had acquired for magnificence, grandeur, and whatever
is

is uncommon and splendid had become habitual, and he preserved it even in retirement. By this taste his works were often embellished, and it occasionally influenced his judgment. On his return to his country, he confined himself to live familiarly with only a few friends. He had lost M. de G  nonville and M. de Maisons, whose death he lamented in such affecting verse, which remains a monument of that true and deep sensibility which nature had bestowed, and genius disseminated through his works, and which was the fortunate origin of his ardent zeal for the happiness of mankind, which was the sublime and continued

tinued passion of his old age. He still possessed M. d'Argental, who, during his long life, preserved sensations of affection and admiration for Voltaire, and who was rewarded by his friendship and his confidence. Madame Forment and Madame Cideville were likewise his friends, and the confidants of his works and his projects.

But about the time when he suffered such various persecution, friendship, still more tender, afforded him consolation and increased his love of retirement. The Marchioness du Chatelet was, like him, passionately enamoured of study and fame, as well as of philo-

fophy ; but it was of that kind of philosophy which springs up in the strong and free mind. She had studied metaphysics and geometry sufficiently to analyze Leibnitz, and translate Newton. She cultivated the arts ; but not undistinguishingly, nor so as to prefer them to the knowledge of nature and man. Superior to prejudice, as well from strength of character as from reason, she had not the weakness to conceal how much prejudice was despised by her. Indulging in the trifling amusements of her sex, rank, and age, she yet could condemn and abandon them without regret in favour of retirement, labour, and friendship. Her
superiority

superiority excited the jealousy of women and even of most of the men, with whom she necessarily associated. Yet she could pardon their envy without an effort. Such was the friend that Voltaire selected with whom to pass his days; days which were ever consecrated to works of genius, and embellished by mutual friendship.

Weary of literary disputes, disgusted to see the league which inferior writers had formed against him, and who were secretly supported by men whose merit should have preserved them from such unworthy associates, finding likewise that since he had dared to speak truth

his accusers were as numerous as his critics, and perceiving that they incessantly armed religion and government against him because he was a good poet, he sought employment more peaceful in the study of the sciences.

He determined to publish an elementary Treatise of the Discoveries of Newton, relative to the system of the earth and of light, that he might render them familiar to all who had the slightest knowledge of mathematics; and that he might make known, at the same time, the philosophic opinions of Newton, and his ideas of ancient chronology.

At

At the time that these Elements appeared, the Cartesian system prevailed even in the Academy of Sciences, at Paris. A few young geometers only had the courage to forsake it; nor did any work exist in the French language from which an idea could be formed of the grand discoveries which had, for half a century, been rendered public in England.

The author, however, was refused a privilege for publication. The Chancellor d'Aguesseau was a Cartesian in his youth, because the system was then fashionable among such as pique themselves on rising superior to vulgar prejudice;

judice ; and, to these his philosophical opinions, were added his political and religious sentiments against Newton. He discovered that a chancellor of France ought not to suffer an English philosopher, who scarcely was a Christian, to rise victorious over a supposed orthodox Frenchman. D' Ageusseau had a prodigious memory, and continued study had rendered him deeply learned in various species of erudition ; but his mind, wearied by being made the receptacle of the opinions of the others, had neither strength sufficient to combine his own ideas, nor to form fixt and definite principles. His superstition, his timidity, his respect for an-

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cient customs, and his want of resolution, narrowed his views relative to a reformation of the laws and impeded his activity. He died, after having been long a minister, and left France to regret that his great virtues had flumbered in inutility, and that his rare qualities had been lost to the world.

His severity respecting the Elements of the Newtonian Philosophy was not the only mark of littleness he shewed during his censorship of the press. He would not give privileges for the printing of novels ; nor would he suffer the novel of Cleveland to be published,

but on condition that the hero should change his religion.

Voltaire, at the same time, pursued the study of experimental philosophy, sent queries of every kind to the learned, and repeated their experiments, or made new ones in their stead,

He was a candidate for the prize, given by the Academy of Sciences, on the nature and propagation of fire; and assumed the following motto, which, for precision and energy, is not unworthy of the author of the *Henriade* :

*Ignis ubique latet naturam amplectitur omnem,
Cuncta parit, renovat, dividit, unit, alit.*

The prize was given to the illustrious Euler, by whom, in scientific contest, no man need blush at being vanquished. Madame du Chatelet, as well as her friend, was likewise a candidate, and both pieces were mentioned in very honourable terms.

The dispute on the measure of forces at that time occupied mathematicians. Voltaire, in a memorial presented to and approved by the Academy, took the part of Des Cartes and Newton against Leibnitz and the two Bernouilli's; nay even against Madame du Chatelet, who was become the partisan of Leibnitz.

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We are far from pretending that these works are any addition to the fame of Voltaire, or even that they deserve a place among the learned, but the merit of having made the French, who are not mathematicians, acquainted with Newton, the true system of the earth, and the principal phœnomena of optics, deserves notice in the life of a philosopher.

It is good to disseminate truth relative to objects of science, whether it relate to the great laws of nature and the order of the world, or to those common facts which fall under every man's observation. Absolute ignorance
is

is ever accompanied by error ; and error in physics often is the support of prejudices of a more dangerous kind. The philosophic knowledge of Voltaire was further useful to him as a poet ; we do not, here, entirely refer to those pieces in which he had the rare merit of expressing truth in verse with precision without disfiguring it, or ceasing to be a poet, or of addressing the imagination while he delighted the ear. The study of the sciences enlarges the sphere of poetic ideas, and enriches verse with new images. Without this resource, poetry, necessarily limited by too confined a circle, would be no more than the art of re-producing,
in

in harmonious language, common thoughts and exhausted pictures.

Be the subject what it may, he who possesses extensive and profound knowledge will ever possess an immense advantage. The poetic genius of Voltaire would have been the same, but he would not have been so great a poet, had he not studied philosophy and history. Nor is it solely in augmenting the number of our ideas that such extraneous studies are useful ; they add to the perfection of the mind, by exercising its various faculties in a more equal manner.

After

After having applied some years to experimental philosophy, Voltaire consulted Clairaut relative to his progress, who had the frankness to answer that after obstinate labour he would never arise above mediocrity in the sciences, and that he would vainly lose that time which fame required he should dedicate to poetry and ethics. Voltaire listened patiently and yielded to that natural inclination which incessantly led him to the Belles Lettres and to the wishes of his friends, who were unable to accompany him in his new career.

He was not therefore entirely absorbed in the sciences during his residence

dence at Cirey. He there wrote *Alzire*, *Zulime*, *Mahomet*, the *History of Charles XII.* finished his *Discourses on Man*, prepared the *Age of Louis XIV.* and collected materials for his *Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations*, from *Charlemagne* to the present age.

Alzire and *Mahomet* are immortal monuments of the height to which the human genius, poetry, and philosophy can raise the tragic art. This art is not in these pieces confined to the portraying the passions, awakening their power over the soul, and making the sweet tears of love and of pity flow; it becomes the tutor of mankind, whom it inclines to
 virtue;

virtue; indolent citizens, who bring with them to the theatre the weariness of having spent a useless day, are there called on to discuss the first grand interests of the human race.

In *Alzire*, we behold the noble but wild and impetuous virtues of the man of nature, combatting the vices of society corrupted by fanaticism and ambition, and, ceding to virtue, made perfect by reason in the soul of *Alzares*, or in the dying and disabused *Gusman*. Here, we at once are taught how society corrupts man by making prejudice the substitute of ignorance, and how it improves

improves him when error is banished by truth.

But the most fatal of prejudices is that of fanaticism. Voltaire was determined the monster should become the victim of the stage ; and, that he might expel it from every heart, he employed these terrible effects which tragedy alone can afford. It, no doubt, was easy to render a fanatic odious, but that this fanatic should be a great man, and that, while abhorring, we should of necessity admire him, that he should descend to mean artifice without degradation, that, while occupied in propagating

gating a religion and raising an empire, he should be in love without being ridiculous, that while committing every crime he should not inspire that painful horror which accompanies the acts of villains, that in the tone of a prophet he should speak the language of genius, that he should be superior to the bigotry with which he intoxicated his ignorant and intrepid disciples yet be above the baseness of hypocrisy, that his crimes should be successful, that he should triumph, yet should appear sufficiently punished by remorse, all this could only be effected by the dramatic art, when employed by the true poet.

Mahomet was first acted at Lisle, in 1741. During the representation, a letter from the king of Prussia was delivered to Voltaire, which informed him of the victory of Molwitz. He stopped the piece to read the letter to the auditors. You will see, said he, to to his surrounding friends, this tragedy of Molwitz will make mine successful. They ventured to play it at Paris; but the bigots, by their exclamations, availing themselves of the weakness of the Cardinal de Fleury, prevailed on him to forbid the representation. Voltaire thought proper to send it to Benedict XIV. with two Latin verses for his portrait. The Pontiff, Lambertini, a tolerant

tolerant and easy prince, but a man of much understanding, sent him a kind answer, accompanied by some medals.

Crébillon was more scrupulous than the pope. He never would consent that a piece should be played, which, by proving that tragic terror may be increased to the utmost excess without sacrificing the pathos or revolting the mind, was a satire on that species of writing, of which he proudly believed himself to be the creator and the model. It was not till the year 1751 that M. D'Alembert, being appointed by M. D'Argenson to examine Mahomet, had the courage to approve it, and

thus to expose himself to the mutual hatred of the men of letters leagued against Voltaire, and of the devotees. His fortitude was the more deserving of respect, because the approver of a work does not participate in its fame, and because he could find no recompense for the danger to which he exposed himself, except the pleasure of having served his friend, and aided the triumph of reason.

Zulima failed of success; nor were the efforts of the author to correct and palliate its faults effectual. A tragedy is an experiment on the human heart, and an experiment which does

not always succeed, even in the most able hands. Zulima, however, is the first woman presented on the stage, who, hurried by passion into criminal acts, still preserved all the generosity and disinterestedness of love. This character, so natural, so violent, and so tender, might perhaps have deserved indulgence from the audience; and the critics of the theatre, in favour of the new beauties of this part, might have pardoned the weakness of the others, which the author himself condemned with equal frankness and severity.

The Discourses on Man are one of the finest monuments of French poetry.

The plan of them may not be so regular as that of the Epistles of Pope, but they possess the advantage of philosophy more true, mild, and general. All the variety of harmony, a kind of carelessness, soothing sensibility, an enthusiasm ever noble and ever real, impart a charm to them, which alternately delights the mind, the imagination, and the heart; a charm, the use of which was known only to Voltaire, and which was that of pleasing, moving, and instructing, without ever fatiguing the reader, and of writing to all understandings, and to all ages. Flashes of true philosophy frequently break forth and are generally addressed
 so

to the feelings or to the fancy as to appear natural, and to become popular. This talent is as beneficial and as rare as that of giving a profound appearance to false and trivial ideas is common and dangerous.

Quitting the company of Pope, we admire his genius, and the address with which he defends his system, but the soul is unmoved, and the mind presently finds that its objections have rather been eluded than answered. But we cannot leave Voltaire without encouragement or consolation ; and, while we have a melancholly prospect of the evils to which nature has con-

demned man, we are likewise acquainted with their antidotes..

The Life of Charles XII. was the first of the historical publications of Voltaire. The style, as rapid as the exploits of the hero, hurries on the reader to an uninterrupted train of splendid expeditions, singular anecdotes, and romantic events, which give curiosity and feeling no repose. The narrative is rarely interrupted by reflections. The author forgot himself that he might give place to his characters. He seems to relate what he has just heard concerning his hero. The single subject is battles and military enterprise; yet, the spirit of a philosopher

philosopher and the soul of a defender of the human race are present every where.

Voltaire wrote from original memoirs, furnished by those who were witnesses of the events; and his historical truth is warranted by the respectable testimony of Stanislaus, the friend, the companion, and the victim of Charles XII.

The history was, notwithstanding, accused of being a novel, because it had all the interest of one. Though no man, perhaps, ever excited so much enthusiasm, neither was any man ever
treated

treated with less indulgence than Voltaire. As a reputation for wit is in France the thing most envied, and as it was impossible for his superiority in wit to remain unacknowledged, he was most vehemently denied every other merit ; and, the pretended claims to wit being as restless in every class of mankind as in that of men of letters, the number of those who envied him was almost equal to that of his readers.

In vain had Voltaire imagined that the retreat of Cirey would hide him from hatred ; he had concealed his person only, his fame still offended his enemies. A libel, which was a malignant

nant attack on his whole life, appeared to the disturbance of his repose. He was treated like a prince, or a minister, because he excited equal envy. The Abbé Desfontaines, who was indebted to Voltaire for liberty and perhaps for life, was the author of this libel. Accused of a shameful vice, which superstition has classed among crimes, he had been imprisoned at a time when, from atrocious and ridiculous policy, it was thought proper to burn a few men, in order to make another man conceive disgust for this vice, to which they falsely supposed him inclined.

Voltaire, being informed of the misfortune of the Abbé Desfontaines, who was personally unknown to him, and whose only recommendation was that he was a man of letters, hastened to Fontainebleau in search of Madame de Prie, then all puissant, from whom he obtained the prisoner's liberty, on condition that he should not appear at Paris. Voltaire further procured him a place of retirement at the seat of a lady of his acquaintance. Here Desfontaines wrote a libel against his benefactor; this he was obliged to throw into the fire, but he never could pardon Voltaire the act of saving his life. He eagerly took every opportunity the
periodical

periodical publications afforded, of attacking him; and it was he who, by the mouth of a priest*, informed the world that Voltaire was the author of *Le Mondain*, an ingenious poem, the intent of which was to shew that luxury, by polishing man's manners and encouraging industry, obviates a part of those ills which take birth in the inequality of, and insensibility attendant on, riches.

He was thus exposed to the danger of new banishment, because, to the reproach of having preached up pleasure, a great one in the eyes of those who

* *Prêtre de séminaire.*

need the cloak of austerity to conceal vice more real, was added the additional crime of having ridiculed the amusements of our first parents.

In fine, the journalists published the *Voltairemanie* ; and then it was that Voltaire, who so long had silently suffered under the slanders of Desfontaines and Rousseau, abandoned himself to emotions of anger, of which his enemies were little worthy.

Not satisfied with avenging himself by delivering up his adversaries to public contempt, and imprinting on them marks which no time can efface,
he

he prosecuted Desfontaines who escaped by disavowing the libel, and who immediately wrote others to console himself for the misfortune. Thus, at the age of forty-four, after having been patient during twenty years, Voltaire, for the first time, forgot that moderation which it were highly to be wished men of letters never should forget. Though they have received from nature the formidable gift of devoting their foes to ridicule and shame, they ought to disdain the use of this dangerous weapon in avenging their own quarrels, and employ it only against the persecutors of truth, and the enemies of the rights of mankind.

The

The friendship, which, about the same time was formed between Voltaire and the prince royal of Prussia, was one of the first causes of the excessive anger of his enemies. The young Frederic had received from his father the education of a soldier only, but nature formed him for a man of an amiable, extensive, and elevated mind, as well as for a great general. He was sent to Rhineberg by his father, who, having conceived the project of beheading him as a deserter because he had attempted to travel without permission, yielded to the remonstrances of the imperial embassador, and satisfied himself with causing the prince to
be

be present at the execution of one of his travelling companions.

In this state of retirement, Frederic, who was enamoured with the French language, poetry, and philosophy, chose Voltaire for his confident and guide. They mutually sent each other their works; the prince consulted the philosopher concerning his studies, and requested lessons and advice. They discussed the most curious as the most difficult metaphysical questions. The prince, at that time, studied the works of Wolf, whose systems and unintelligible language he soon abjured for philosophy more simple and more true.

He also employed himself in a refutation of Machiavel : that is, in proving that the most certain policy of a sovereign is to make moral rules his guide, and that his personal interest does not necessarily render him the enemy of his subjects and his neighbours, as Machiavel had supposed, either from a love of hypothesis or to disgust his countrymen with a monarchical government, toward which they seemed to be inclined by their weariness of a republican system ever tempestuous and often cruel.

In the preceding century, Tycho-Brahe, Des Cartes, and Leibnitz, had enjoyed the society of monarchs, by
whom

whom they had been loaded with marks of esteem ; but confidence and freedom did not preside in this too unequal intercourse. Of these Frederic gave the first example, in which, unfortunately for his fame, he forgot to persist. He sent his friend, the Baron de Keyserling, to visit the *Deities* of Cirey, and to bear his portrait and manuscripts to Voltaire. The philosopher was moved, perhaps flattered, by this homage ; but his greatest pleasure was the prospect of a prince destined to reign, who loved literature, and was the friend of philosophy and the foe of superstition. He hoped the author of the *Anti-Machiavel* would be a pacific

monarch, and he took serious delight in secretly printing the book which he believed must bind the prince to virtue from the fear of betraying his own principles, and of reading his condemnation in the work he himself had written.

When Frederic ascended the throne, he testified no change, but remained the friend of Voltaire. The cares of government did not enfeeble his love of poetry, nor his avidity to possess the unpublished writings of Voltaire, which were read by scarcely any except himself and Madame du Chatelet. Yet, one of his first steps was to suspend the publication,

publication of the *Anti-Machiavel*. Voltaire obeyed, and the corrections which he had made with regret were rendered fruitless.

His desire that his disciple, now a king, should enter into a public engagement, which should secure his adherence to philosophic maxims, was increased. He went to meet him at Wezel, and was astonished to see a young monarch in a uniform, on a camp-bed, shivering with a fever. But his fever did not prevent him from profiting by his neighbourhood to the principality of Liege, and enforcing the payment of a forgotten debt, from

the bishop. Voltaire wrote the memorial, which was supported by the bayonet, and he returned to Paris well satisfied to have found his hero an amiable man. But he refused the offers of the king, who wished to draw him to Prussia, and preferred the friendship of Madame du Châtelet to the favour of a monarch whom he admired.

The king of Prussia declared war against the daughter of Charles VI. and took advantage of her weakness to render some old pretensions on Silesia valid. Two battles secured him the possession of the province. Cardinal de Fleury, who had undertaken the war
in

in his own despite, continued his secret negotiations. The empress perceived her interest was not to treat with France, against whom she hoped for useful allies, who would themselves support the burden of war; whereas, if she had none but the Prussian monarch to combat, she must be left to herself, and must behold the wishes and secret aid of those very powers on the side of her foe. She rather chose therefore to stifle her resentment, inform Frederic of the propositions of the cardinal, induce him to make peace by this confidence, and purchase by the sacrifice of Silesia, the neutrality of the enemy whom she had most to fear.

The war had not interrupted the correspondence between the king and Voltaire. Frederic sent poetry from the field, while preparing for battle, or amid the tumult of victory; and Voltaire, continuing to praise his military fame, never ceased to preach humanity and peace.

The Cardinal de Fleury died. Voltaire had been intimate with him, because he was desirous of learning the anecdotes of the reign of Louis XIV; and Fleury, who loved to relate them, dwelt on those which regarded himself, not doubting that Voltaire would eagerly insert them in his history.

But

But the hatred of Fleury, and of all feeble men, for one who rose superior to common powers, was greater than his love of taste, and even than his vanity.

Fleury endeavoured to impede freedom of speech, and even of thought, in France, that he might govern with the greater ease. During his whole life, he had maintained a warfare of opinions in the kingdom, by his very endeavours to smother those opinions, and prevent them from troubling the public repose. He was terrified by the daringness of Voltaire ; equally afraid of exposing himself, should he defend
the

the poet, or his trifling claims to renown, should he abandon him with too much cowardice, Voltaire found him rather a clandestine persecutor than a patron; but one who was retained by his respect for public opinion and his own fame.

Voltaire was designed to be his successor in the French academy: he had lately acquired new claims which must have silenced envy, had she been capable of a blush. He had enriched the stage by another master-piece: by *Merope*, the only tragedy in which tears freely and sweetly flow, without the aid of the misfortunes of love. The

author

author of *Zaire* had before opposed the maxim of Boileau,

*De cette passion la sensible peinture
Est, pour aller au cœur, la route, la plus sûre.**

He had affirmed that nature was capable of producing more feeling and more heart-rending effects on the stage; and in *Merope*, he proved his assertion.

If however Boileau, by *sûrest*, understood the *least difficult*, facts are in his favour. Various poets have written affecting tragedies founded on love: *Merope* stands alone.

* A pathetic picture of love, is the surest road to the heart.

Hurried

Hurried on by the interest of the situations, a rapidity of dialogue till then unknown to the stage, and by the talent of an actress who had caught the impassioned tones of nature, the pit was agitated with unexampled enthusiasm. Voltaire, who was concealed in a corner of the house, was obliged to appear before the spectators. He came into the box of the lady of Marshal de Villars. The house called on the young duchess of Villars to kiss the author of *Merope* ; and she was under the necessity of obeying the imperious will of the public, intoxicated with admiration and pleasure.

This

This was the first time that the pit called for the author of a piece; but what was then no more than homage, rendered to genius, degenerated afterward into custom, and is now a ridiculous and humiliating ceremony, to which authors, who respect themselves, refuse to submit.

To this new claim, which even devotion was obliged to respect, was added the support of Madame de Châteauroux, then governed by the Duke de Richelieu; an extraordinary man, who, at the age of twenty, had twice been in the Bastile, for the rashness of his gallantries; who, by the rumour
and

and the number of his adventures, had made himself so fashionable, among women, as for it to be almost regarded as an honour to be dishonoured by him; and who, among his imitators, had formed a kind of gallantry in which love was no longer the inclination to pleasure, but the vanity of seduction. This same man afterward contributed to the fame of the victory of Fontenoy, supported the revolution of Genoa, took port Mahon, and obliged an English army to lay down its arms; and when that army had broken the treaty, when it threatened his dispersed and feeble quarters, he stopped its progress by his activity and boldness.

After

After which he sunk into the intrigues of the court, and lost, in the manœuvres of a tyrannical and corrupt administration, that fame which might have obliterated his early errors.

The duke de Richelieu had from his infancy been the friend of Voltaire; and, though Voltaire had often cause of complaint against him, yet he preserved that remembrance of youthful affection which time cannot eradicate, and a kind of confidence which was rather maintained by habit than by conviction. The duke continued faithful to his old friend, as much as the levity of his character, his caprice, his petty

petty despotism at the theatres, his contempt for every man who was not a courtier, his weakness toward people in power, and his insensibility for all that was noble, or useful, would permit.

At this period he promoted the interest of Voltaire with Madame de Châteauroux. But M. de Maurepas did not love Voltaire. The Abbé de Chaulieu had written an epigram against Oedipus, because he was offended to see a young man, who had become his rival in fugitive poetry into which philosophy and voluptuousness were infused, acquire the additional fame of succeeding-

succeeding at the theatre; and M. de
 Maurepas, whose vanity was to be the
 man of most wit at table, could not
 pardon Voltaire for so evidently rob-
 bing him of this advantage, with which
 it was not too ridiculous, at that time,
 for a minister of state to be flattered.

Voltaire attempted to disarm his an-
 ger by an epistle, in which he bestow-
 ed such praise as might appear most
 natural to the mind and character of
 M. de Maurepas. This epistle, which
 contained as much instruction as eulo-
 gium, effected no change in the senti-
 ments of the minister; who, that he
 might prevent Voltaire from gaining
 Vol. I. L a place

a place in the academy, combined with the priest Boyer, whom Fleury had preferred, as the tutor of the dauphin, to Maffillon, whose talents and virtue he feared; and which Boyer he, on his death-bed, recommended to the king to the charge of bestowing ecclesiastical benefices, apparently from the hope that his memory might be regretted by the Jansenists. M. de Maurepas was likewise glad to have an opportunity of secretly counteracting Madame de Châteauroux, with whose hatred for him he was well acquainted. Voltaire, being informed of his intention, went to him and asked, if Madame de Châteauroux should support him

him in the election, whether he would oppose him. I will, answered the minister, and *will crush you**.

* In order to be just, it is here necessary to relate that having, after the death of Voltaire, mentioned this anecdote to the count de Maurepas, to whose character such an answer does not seem natural, he, laughing, answered that it was the king himself who would not suffer Voltaire to succeed the Cardinal de Fleury, in his place of academician. His majesty thought there was too marked a distance, between the men, to put the eulogium of the one, in the mouth of the other, and afford laughter to the public by such an association.

M. de Maurepas further added, that he had long known Voltaire had written the anecdote of *I will crush you*. But this trifling act of injustice, from a man so celebrated, had not prevented him from soliciting and obtaining leave, from the present king, that the poet, who had been so great an honour to his age and nation, might return to Paris, at the close of his life, there to enjoy the fruits of his fame.

This is the note of the general correspondent of the literary typographical society.

He knew how easy this would be to a minister ; and that, under a feeble government, the influence of a mistress must yield to that of intriguing fanatic priests, who were more despicable than a prostitute, in the eyes of reason, though more respected by the populace. Boyer was triumphant.

The minister soon after perceived how necessary the alliance of the king of Prussia was to France. But this monarch feared to engage anew with a power whose timid and wavering policy could not inspire confidence. Voltaire, it was supposed, might induce him to change his opinion, and was
secretly

secretly charged with this negotiation: It was agreed that the persecution of Boyer should be the pretext of his journey into Prussia. He thus obtained the liberty to ridicule the poor priest, who went to complain to the king that Voltaire made him appear a fool in foreign courts. The king answered—"It was a settled point."

Voltaire departed, and Piron, at the head of his enemies, wrote abundance of epigrams and songs on his pretended disgrace. Piron was in the habit of insulting all celebrated men who underwent persecution. His works abound with proofs of this mean ma-

lice ; yet he had the character of a good natured man, because he was insolent ; and, not having any native dignity of mind, he did not offend the vanity of others.

After having passed some time with the King of Prussia, who constantly refused all negociation with France, Voltaire had the address to divine the true motive of his refusal. It was the weakness that France had persisted in not to declare war against the English, and by this conduct to appear to entreat for peace, when she had a right to dictate its conditions.

He returned to Paris and gave an account of his journey. The following spring the King of Prussia again declared war against the Queen of Hungary, by which useful diversion he obliged her troops to evacuate Alsatia. This important service, with that of having penetrated, as he passed through the Hague, into the views of the Dutch who apparently were in a state of uncertainty, did not procure Voltaire any of those marks of respect from which he wished to raise a rampart against his literary enemies.

The Marquis D'Argenson was called to the ministry. He was a man

who deserves to be ranked among those few people in power who have really loved philosophy, and the public good. His taste for literature had connected him with Voltaire, whom he more than once employed to write manifestos, declarations, and dispatches, the style of which was required to be correct, dignified, and well adapted.

Such was the manifesto which was to have been published by the Pretender, on his descent into Scotland with a small French army, which the Duke de Richelieu was to have commanded. Voltaire had then an opportunity of labouring in conjunction with Count Lally,

Lally, a zealous Jacobite, and the determined enemy of the English; whose memory Voltaire afterward defended with so much fortitude when an unjust sentence, executed with barbarity, sacrificed him to the resentment of some of the servants of the East India Company.

But he had, at the same time, a support more potent in the Marchioness de Pompadour, with whom he had been intimate while her name was d'Etiole. She committed the writing of a piece to him, for the first marriage of the Dauphin. The place of gentleman of the chamber, the title of historiographer

toriographer of France, and in fine the protection of the court, which was necessary to oppose the faction of devotees who excluded him the French academy, were the recompense he received. It was on this occasion that he wrote the following verses :

*Mon Henri quatre et ma Zaïre,
Et mon Américaine Alzire,
Ne m'ont valu jamais un seul regard du Roi ;
J'eus beaucoup d'ennemis, avec très-peu de gloire ;
Les honneurs et les biens pleuvent enfin sur moi,
Pour une farce de la foire*.*

This was passing rather too severe a judgment on the Princess of Navarre,

* The Henriade, Zaïre, and my American Alzire never obtained me a look from majesty; I had many enemies and little fame; but honours at length are showered on me, for having written a farce.

which

which is a work full of noble and affecting gallantry.

The favour of the court however was insufficient to open the doors of the academy. He was obliged, in order to disarm the devotees, to write a letter to Father la Tour, in which he made protestation of his respect for religion, and, which was more necessary, of his attachment to the Jesuits. In despite of the address with which he manages his language in that letter, it were better he had renounced the academy than have had the weakness to write it. This weakness would have been inexcusable had it been the sacrifice of vanity,

in

in order to obtain a title which had long been incapable of adding honour to the name of Voltaire. But he supposed it his shield; he imagined he should find support against persecution from the academy. He presumed too favourably of the fortitude and justice of his associates.

In his discourse to the academy, he first threw off the yoke of custom, by which these discourses seemed rather condemned to be a string of compliments than of true praise. Voltaire boldly spoke of literature and of taste, and his example is in some manner become a law, against which the academicians,

micians, who are men of letters, rarely venture to err. But he did not go so far as to suppress their reiterated praise of Richelieu, Séguier, and Louis XIV. which has hitherto been done only by two or three of the boldest academicians. He mentioned Crébillon, in his discourses, with the noble generosity of a man who fears not to honour the talents of a rival, or to afford arms to his own antagonists.

A new torrent of libels was poured upon him, which he had not the fortitude to despise. The police was, at that time, committed to a man who had passed some months in the country with

Madame

Madame de Pompadour. A wretched musician, of the opera band, was arrested, whose name was Travenol, and and who, with the advocate Rigoley de Juvigny, privately sold these libels. The father of Travenol, an old man of eighty, went to Voltaire, and demanded pardon for his guilty son; and the anger of the poet was hushed by the first cry of humanity. He wept with, embraced, and consoled the old man; and hastened away with him, to obtain the liberty of his son.

Voltaire was not long in favour. Madame de Pompadour caused those honours to be conferred on Crébillon, which

which he had been refused. Voltaire had constantly done justice to the author of *Rhadamistus*, but he could not be so humble as to suppose him superior to the author of *Alzire*, *Mahomet*, and *Merope*. In such exaggerated enthusiasm for *Crébillon*, he discovered nothing but a secret desire that he himself should be humbled : nor was he deceived.

The wit and the poet might have preserved powerful friends ; but these titles in Voltaire concealed a philosopher, a man more earnest for the progress of reason, than the acquirement of personal fame.

His

His character, naturally proud and independent, yielded to ingenious adulation ; he was prodigal of praise, but he preserved his feelings and his opinions, and the freedom of discovering them. Strong or affecting lessons rose out of panegyric ; but that manner of praising which might succeed at the court of Frederic, could not but offend at any other court.

He therefore returned to Cirey, and soon afterwards to the court of Stanislaus. This prince, twice elected king of Poland, once by the will of Charles XII. and once by the desire of the nation, never possessed more than
the

the title of sovereign. Having retired into Lorraine with this title, he there repaired, by his beneficent acts, the ills which the French administration had committed : the paternal government of Leopold corrected an age of devastation and misfortune. His devotion had neither deprived him of the love of pleasure nor of an affection for men of wit. His house was that of a wealthy private person ; his manners those of native candour ; of a man who had never been unhappy, except because others had determined to make him a king ; nor ever dazzled by a title, from which he had derived nothing but danger. He wished to see

Madame du Chatelet and Voltaire at his court, or rather living as his inmates. The author of the seasons [†], the only French poet, who like Voltaire has united philosophy and wit, then lived at Luneville, where he was only known as an amiable young officer; but his first poetical productions, full of reason, wit, and taste, even then bespoke a man born to be an honour to his age.

At Luneville, where Voltaire lived life of occupation and mild tranquillity, he had the misfortune to lose his friend. Madame du Chatelet died,

• St. Lambert.

at the moment when she had finished her translation of Newton; the labour of which had shortened her days: King Stanislaus went to console and weep with Voltaire in his chamber.

Having returned to Paris, the poet betook himself to his labours, a means of dissipating grief, which nature has imparted but to few. Such a power over our thoughts, and such force of mind, which affliction cannot vanquish, are precious gifts, which must not be depreciated by confounding them with want of feeling. Sensibility is not weakness; it is a capability of grief, without being overwhelmed by it: the

soul is not the less affectionate, nor has sorrow been less sincere, because opposed with fortitude ; or because conquered by extraordinary powers.

Voltaire was weary of hearing the fashionable world, and most men of letters, prefer Crébillon to himself ; which they did less from opinion than to punish him for the universality of his talents. Men are ever more indulgent to circumscribed genius, which exerted on one object appears to be a kind of instinct, because it offends not so many species of self-love, and humbles their pride less.

This

This opinion of the superiority of Crébillon was maintained with so much passion, that, in the preliminary discourse to the Encyclopedia, M. D'Alembert had need of fortitude to grant equality to the author of *Alzire* and *Merope*, and durst not extend justice further. Voltaire at length determined to avenge himself, and oblige the public to give him his true rank, by writing *Semiramis*, *Orestes*, and *Rome Preserved*; which three subjects had before been treated by Crébillon. Every cabal that had been formed against Voltaire had united, to obtain momentary success for the *Cataline* of his rival; a piece, the conduct of which is absurd and the

style barbarous; in which Cicero proposes that his daughter should seduce Cataline, and a high priest appoints a rendezvous for the lovers in a temple, where he introduces a courtesan in men's clothes, and afterward treats the senate as impious, because it there discussed on state affairs,

On the contrary, *Rome Preserved* is the master-piece of style and of reason, in which Cicero appears with all his dignity and eloquence; in which Cæsar speaks and acts like a man born to reduce Rome to subjection, to overwhelm his opponents by his glory, and obtain pardon for tyranny by the force
of

of his talents and virtues; and in which Cataline is a villain, but one who endeavours to excuse his vices from example, and his crimes from necessity. Republican energy and Roman feelings entirely possess the poet.

Voltaire had a small theatre on which he acted his pieces, and where he often played the part of Cicero. Never, it is said, was illusion more complete: while he recited he appeared to create his character; and when, in the fifth act, Cicero again appeared before the senate, when he excused his love of fame by reciting the following beautiful lines:

*Romains, j'aime la gloire, et ne veux point m'en taire ;
Des travaux des humains c'est le digne salaire,
Sénat, en vous servant il la faut acheter ;
Qui n'ose la vouloir, n'ose la mériter *.*

the character and the poet were one, and the auditor imagined he heard Cicero, or Voltaire, avow and excuse this weakness of great minds.

There is only one good part in the *Electra* of Crébillon, and this is a subaltern character. Orestes, who knows not that he is Orestes, is in love with the daughter of Ægypthus, who has the

Romans, I frankly own my thirst for fame,
The rich reward of peril, pain, and care ;
Most nobly purchas'd in our country's cause !
Who dare not hope for, cannot merit fame.

mis-

misfortune to be called Iphianassa. The implacable Electra is enamoured with the son of Ægyſthus, and theſe inſipid amours occupy the ſcene, while the furies are leading a bewildered ſon to the commiſſion of parricide; being condemned by the gods to take this horrible revenge.

Voltaire felt that Clytemneſtra ſhould be rendered intereſting by her remorse, by being characteriſed as rather feeble than guilty, and overawed by the cruel Ægyſthus, but aſhamed of having loved him, and ſenſible of the weight of her chains and of her crimes. If we compare this with the other tragedies of

Voltaire.

Voltaire, we shall, no doubt, find it much inferior to his best works; but if we contrast it with Sophocles, whom he meant to follow, that he might teach the French the character and tragic conceptions of that poet, we shall perceive he had the art to preserve his beauties, imitate his style, correct his defects, and render Clytemnestra more pathetic, and Electra less barbarous. For which reason, when, in despite of cabal, the permanent beauties of the Greek poet were transmitted to the French stage, by a man worthy of becoming the interpreter of the most eloquent of the ancient tragic writers, and there enforce applause, Voltaire,

more

more ardent in the interest of good taste than in behalf of his own fame, could not forbear calling to the pit, in a momentary effusion of rapture, "Go on Athenians, it is Sophocles."

The *Semiramis* of Crébillon was no sooner produced than forgotten. That of Voltaire is the same subject which, fifteen years before, he had treated under the name of *Eryphile*, and which he withdrew from the stage, though the piece was highly applauded. During its representations, he more perfectly felt all the difficulties of the fable. He perceived that, to render a woman who had destroyed her husband,

that

that she might reign herself, interesting, it was necessary that the splendour of her reign, her conquests, her virtues, and the extent of her empire should force respect, and seize on the mind of the spectators ; that the criminal queen should be the mistress of the world, and possess the virtues of a great monarch. He felt that, while exhibiting the prodigies of a foreign religion on the stage, it would be necessary, by magnificence and an elevated and religious style, not to suffer the imagination to cool, to make the gods interfere on all occasions, and to conceal the absurdity of a miracle by incessantly presenting the consolatory idea of a

Divine

Divine Power, exercising a slow but inevitable vengeance on the secret crimes of kings.

Love, offensive in Orestes, was necessary in Semiramis. Ninyas must have a mistress, that he might feel a tenderness for Semiramis, be sensible of her kindness, and that she might fascinate him by her charms before he knew her to be his mother; otherwise the horror which incest inspires would have been injurious to that character which was to interest the audience. The style of Semiramis, the majesty of the subject, the pomp of the exhibition, and the peculiar pathos of some of the scenes,

Scenes were triumphant over envy and faction. But it was long before equal justice was rendered to Orestes, and Rome Preserved.

Complete justice, perhaps, has not yet been done; nor can we be surpris'd at this, when we recollect that all colleges and all the houses in which the teachers of youth are themselves educated are devoted to fanaticism, and that children in general are educated in prejudices against Voltaire.

These three pieces he wrote at Sceaux, the seat of the Dukes du Maine, who delighted in poetry, gal-
lantry,

lantry, and the arts ; and who in her palace, presented a picture of those ingenuous and splendid pleasures which had embellished the court of Lewis the XIVth, and dignified his follies. She delighted in Cicero, and prevailed on Voltaire to write his Rome Preserved to avenge the outrage committed on the orator by Crébillon. Mahomet was sent to the pope, and Semiramis dedicated to a cardinal. He took a secret pleasure in convincing the French fanatics that the ecclesiastical princes knew how to combine the love of genius with religious zeal, and that they did not think they promoted Christianity by treating these men as its enemies

mies who by their powers of mind were the formidable rulers of public opinion.

It was at this period that he, at length, yielded to the invitations of the king of Prussia, and accepted the title of Chamberlain, the grand cross of the order of merit, and a pension of 20,000 livres. In his own country, he saw himself the object of envy and hatred to men of letters, although he never had been their opponent in soliciting for places and pensions, never had humbled them by his criticisms, nor ever had interfered in literary cabals, but had obliged all who needed

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ed his services, had endeavoured to gain their affection by praising them and taken every opportunity of winning the friendship of those whom self-love had rendered unjust.

The priests, who forgot not the Letters on the English Nation and Mahomet, while they were waiting occasion to persecute him, endeavoured to decry him and his works, and employed their whole ascendancy over youth against him, especially that which, as spiritual directors, they preserved over private families and the devotees of the court. Absolute silence only could preserve him from calumny. He could pub-

lish no work without being certain that malignity would endeavour thence to accuse him of being impious, or to render him suspected by government. Madame de Pompadour, elevated to a situation in which she wished to be surrounded by none but slaves, forgot their former intimacy. She could not pardon his not having suffered with sufficient patience the preference granted to Crébillon. Louis the XVth had a kind of dislike to Voltaire, although he had flattered that prince to the injury of his own fame : but kings are, by habit, rendered almost insensible to public adulation ; the artful praise of the courtiers, who, seizing every

every

every trifling occasion, repeat their panegyric continually and at the luckiest moments, is alone seducing. This flattery consists less in direct praise, than in an adroit approbation of the passions, inclinations, acts, and sentiments of the monarch; half a word, a motion, a general maxim which excuses their follies or their faults, produce greater effects than poetry which is worthy of posterity. The eulogies of genius soothe only those kings who have an actual love of fame.

It is said that Voltaire, approaching Louis XV. after the representation of the Temple of Fame, in which

Trajan after his victories accords peace to the world, and receives the crown which had been refused to conquerors and reserved for the man who was the friend of humanity, thus addressed the monarch—*Trajan est-il content* * ? and that the king was less flattered by the comparison than offended by the familiarity.

M. d'Argenson refused to support Voltaire as a candidate for the title of Free Associate of the Academy of Sciences, and for obtaining a seat in the Academy of Belles Lettres, of which places he was at that time ambitious, as

* Is Trajan satisfied ?

a refuge

a refuge against the army of periodical critics who were obliged by the police to treat literary bodies with respect, except when other bodies or powerful individuals thought it their interest to humble them by abandoning them to the attacks of these contemptible enemies.

Voltaire, therefore, went to Berlin, and the very monarch, who had disdained him, and the court, in which he had been treated with disrespect, were offended at his departure. The loss of a man who honoured France, and the disgrace of having obliged him to seek an asylum in another country,

were then only remembered, In the palace of the king of Prussia, he found peace and even the semblance of freedom; feeling at first no kind of subjection, except that of passing some hours with the king to correct his works, and to teach him the art of writing. He usually supped with his majesty; and these suppers, at which there was freedom in excess, where every question of metaphysics and morals was discussed without restraint, where the most unbounded pleasantry enlivened, or cut serious argument short, and where the king generally disappeared to give place to the man of wit, were moments of agreeable relaxation to Voltaire. The remainder

remainder of his time was consecrated to study.

Here he improved some of his tragedies, finished his *Age of Louis the XIVth*, corrected his poem of the *Maid of Orleans*, wrote part of his *Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations*, and composed the poem on *Natural Law*; while *Frederic* governed his states without a minister, inspected and improved his army, composed poetry and music, and wrote philosophy and history.

The royal family encouraged Voltaire in his pursuits; he addressed

verses to the princesses, acted tragedy with the brothers and sisters of the king, and, while he taught them to declaim, led them to feel the beauties of French poetry : for poetry ought to be spoken aloud ; nor can it be understood, in a foreign tongue, by those who are not in the habit of hearing it recited by speakers, who can give it that accent and force which are its characteristics.

This, Voltaire called the palace of Alcina ; but the enchantment was of too short duration. The men of literature, who had been longer at Berlin than himself, were jealous of preference

ence which was too conspicuous, especially of that kind of independence which he preserved, that familiarity which the charms and brilliancy of his wit gave him, and that art of mingling truth with panegyric and of imparting to flattery the tone of jocular ease.

La Métrie told Voltaire that the king, to whom he was one day mentioning those marks of kindness he discovered for his chamberlain, replied, “ I want him at present to revise my works; but having sucked the orange, we throw away the rind.” When Voltaire heard this, the enchantation was over; and his mind felt that kind of
suspicion

suspicion which never suffered him to lose sight of his project for escaping.

In the mean time the king was informed that Voltaire, being pressed by general Manstein to revise his memoirs, had answered, “ The king has sent me his dirty linen to wash, yours must wait ;” and that, another time, he had said in a fit of ill humour, pointing to some poetical papers of the king, lying on the table, “ That man is Cæsar and the Abbé Cottin.”

Mutual inclination, however, acted on the monarch and the philosopher. Frederic said, long after their separation,

tion, that he had never met with so amiable a man as Voltaire; and Voltaire, notwithstanding his resentment which never was entirely effaced, confessed, that when Frederic thought proper, he was the most pleasing of mankind. They likewise united in their open contempt for prejudice and superstition; the pleasure they took in making them the eternal objects of their jests, their common love for that philosophy which is chearful and inviting, and their mutual disposition to search and to seize on the ridiculous in whatever pretended to superior gravity, were the same. Hence it should have seemed that the storm must have ended

ended in a calm, and that interest and pleasure must have continued them in friendship; but the jealousy of Maupertuis rendered them irreconcilable.

Maupertuis, a man of much wit, but not of too much learning, and of still less philosophy, was tormented by that desire of fame which makes us chuse trifling means when the great are wanting, utter paradoxes when we are unable to discover truths, generalise formula when we cannot invent them, and accumulate incongruities when we are deficient in new ideas. In Paris, he had been seen to leave the company, or hide himself behind a screen,

a screen, when he could not continue the principal speaker; and in like manner at Berlin, whether at the academy of sciences or the table of the king, he would be the first. He was indebted to Voltaire for a great part of his reputation, as well as for the honour of being perpetual president of the academy of Berlin, and of exercising authority there in his majesty's name.

Some jests which Voltaire had indulged in, when Maupertuis, following the king to the army, was taken prisoner at the battle of Molwitz, had angered him, and he vented his complaints with ill humour. Voltaire returned

turned a friendly answer, and appeased him by writing four lines for his portrait. Maupertuis, some years afterward, took it much amiss that Voltaire had not mentioned him in his discourse when elected to the French academy; and the arrival of Voltaire at Berlin completed his disgust. He saw him the friend of the sovereign, in whose presence he himself was but a courtier; and beheld him giving lessons to the man from whom he received orders.

Surrounded by enemies, and diffident of the continuance of royal friendship, Voltaire secretly regretted, and
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endeavoured to recover, his lost independence. He thought proper to employ a jew to transfer a part of his property out of Prussia. The jew betrayed his trust; and, to revenge himself on Voltaire, who, having detected him, would not suffer himself to be robbed, he brought an absurd action, knowing that hatred is not difficult in admitting evidence. The king, to punish his *friend* for having attempted to preserve his liberty and property, pretended to believe him guilty, to deliver him up to justice, and even to exclude him his presence till the cause should be determined.

Voltaire addressed himself to Maupertuis, who had not yet openly testified his sentiments, and requested his interference with the chief judge. Maupertuis returned a haughty refusal, and Voltaire perceived he had another enemy. This ridiculous suit, at length, ended as it should do; the jew was condemned, and was pardoned by Voltaire. The king then admitted Voltaire once more, and added new marks of respect to former kindness, by bestowing on him a house near Potsdam.

The eyes of hatred, however, are always open and watchful of opportunity.

nity. La Beaumelle, a protestant, and native of Languedoc, first an apprentice to a gospel minister at Geneva, and afterwards acting the French wit in Denmark, being soon dismissed from Copenhagen, came to seek his fortune at Berlin ; having no other title to fame than that of having lately published a libel. He went to Voltaire, and presented the book to him, in which Voltaire himself was ill treated, and in which the men of wit, who had been invited into Prussia, among whom he was come to solicit a place, was compared to apes or these dwarfs who had formerly been maintained at certain courts. Such a ridiculous oversight

was the momentary object of pleasantry at the king's supper; but the jests were reported to La Beaumelle by Maupertuis, who, charging them all to the account of Voltaire, made La Beaumelle his irreconcilable foe, and secured to himself a tool, who aided his malice by shameful libels, without bringing the character of the president of the academy in question.

Maupertuis wanted assistance; he had lately advanced the *least possible action*, as a new mechanical principle, which was much controverted, though the illustrious Euler did it the honour of defending it, and at the same
 4 time

time instructed its author in its full extent and true use. Koëinig not only opposed it, but asserted it was not new, and quoted the fragment of a letter from Leibnitz, in which it was contained. Maupertuis, having learnt from Koëinig himself that he had only a copy of the letter from Leibnitz, thought proper formally to summons him before the academy of Berlin, to produce the original. Koëinig answered that he obtained his copy from the unfortunate Hienzi, who had long since been beheaded, for having attempted to deliver the people of the Canton of Bern from the tyranny of the senate. The original was not to be found among the remaining papers

of Hienzi, and the academy, from motives partly of fear and partly of meanness, declared Koëinig unworthy of the title of academician, and struck him from their list. Maupertuis seemed not to have known that the general voice of the learned only could bestow, or take from him, the honour of making a discovery, that this opinion must be free and voluntary, and that any formal act, by rendering it suspicious, would but diminish its authority.

Voltaire had been acquainted with Koëinig at Cirey, where he came to give lessons in the doctrines of Leibnitz to Madame du Chatelet. He had pre-
served

served a degree of friendship for him, though he had sometimes indulged himself in jests to his disadvantage, during his residence in France. He did not love Maupertuis, and hated persecution, whatever form it might assume to torment mankind; he therefore openly took the part of Koënis, and published some writings, in which reason and justice were seasoned by delicate and poignant wit. Maupertuis engaged the vanity of the king in behalf of the honour of his academy, and prevailed on him to exact a promise from Voltaire to ridicule neither it nor its president. The promise was given, but unfortunately the king, who had

commanded silence, imagined he himself might speak. He wrote several humorous pieces, which, but with some little inequality, were partly against Maupertuis, and partly against Voltaire. The latter imagined that the king, by this conduct, had released him from his promise, and that the privilege of being the only one who should laugh was not included in the royal prerogative. He, therefore, profited by a general permission which he had formerly obtained, and sent his *Akalia* to the press, in which Maupertuis was devoted to eternal ridicule.

The king laughed. He had little affection, and less esteem for Maupertuis ;

tuis ; yet, jealous of his own authority, he caused this piece of humour to be burnt by the hangman. This is a mode of vengeance which it is rather singular that a philosophic king should borrow from the inquisition.

The insulted Voltaire sent the monarch his cross, his key, and the patent for his pension, with the four following lines—

*Je les reçû avec tendresse,
Je les renvois avec douleur ;
Comme un amant, dans sa jalouse ardeur,
Rend le portrait de sa maîtresse*.*

- * These gifts I took, with joy of heart,
From them with grief, as great, I part ;
The jealous lover, thus, returns
Her gifts, for whom his bosom burns.

He fought for freedom, but he could not obtain this by sending back what he at first had called *splendid baubles*, but which he ever afterward named *marks of slavery*. He wrote from Berlin, where he was ill, for permission to depart. The king, who wished to humble but not to lose him, sent him some bark, but no permission. He again wrote that it was necessary he should go and drink the waters of Plombiers; he was answered, those of Silesia were equally salutary.

Voltaire, at length, thought proper to ask to see his majesty, flattering himself that by his presence he could
awaken

awaken sentiments which were rather wounded than extinct.

The baubles he had formerly possessed were returned to him. He hastened to Potsdam, saw the king, and a few moments produced a total change. Familiarity revived, former cheerfulness was recovered even at the expence of Maupertuis, and Voltaire obtained permission to go to Plombiers, on giving his promise to return. This promise was not, perhaps, very sincere, but it was less obligatory than one given between equals; the hundred and fifty thousand men, who guarded the Prussian frontiers would not suffer it

it to be considered as given with entire freedom.

Voltaire hastened to Leipzig, where he made some stay, to recover his strength, which had been exhausted by this long persecution. Maupertuis sent him a ridiculous challenge, the only effect of which was, that it opened a new source to his inexhaustible pleasantries. From Leipzig he went to visit the Duchess of Saxe-Gotha, a princess, who cultivated letters, loved philosophy, and was superior to prejudice. At her request he there began his *Annals of the Empire*.

From

From Gotha, he departed for Plombiers; and took the road to Frankfort. Maupertuis was determined on revenge; his challenge had been unsuccessful, and the libels of La Beaumelle he thought insufficient. This his contemptible second had been obliged to quit Berlin, after a ridiculous adventure and some weeks imprisonment. He had fled to Gotha with a chambermaid, who had robbed the mistress she had left; his libels had driven him from Frankfort; and he had scarcely arrived at Paris before he was thrown into the Bastille. The president of the academy at Berlin had therefore to seek another avenger. He embittered the
 ill

ill humour of the king. The slowness with which Voltaire travelled, his stay at Gotha, and a considerable annuity for the lives of himself and his niece Madame Denis purchased of the Duke of Wirtemberg, all spoke his determination of never returning to Prussia, and he had taken with him a copy of the poetical works of the king, which were then only known to the wits of the court.

A fear was excited in Frederic's mind that a species of vengeance, terrible even to a royal poet, would be taken. It was possible, at least, that Voltaire should imagine he had a right to re-
claim

claim the verses he had given, and to specify those he had corrected. The king gave a knave, whom he kept in his pay at Frankfort to purchase or kidnap men for him, an order to arrest Voltaire, and not to release him till he should have yielded up his cross, his key, and the grant of his pension, together with the poems which Freitag called “the work of *Poesbys* of the king his master.” These volumes had unfortunately been left at Leipzig, and Voltaire was kept in close confinement for three weeks. Madame Denis his neice, who had come to meet him, was treated with like rigour. Guards were placed at the door, and a soldier continued
in

in each of their chambers who never suffered them to leave his sight, such fears were entertained lest the work of *Poesbys* should escape. This precious pledge was at length restored to Freitag, and Voltaire was released; but not however till he had been obliged to bestow money on certain adventurers who took that opportunity to commence litigious suits: having escaped from Frankfort he went to Colmar.

The King of Prussia, ashamed of his ridiculous anger, disavowed the proceedings of Freitag, but he had so much morality as not to punish him for having obeyed. It is strange that a
city,

city, calling itself free, should suffer a foreign power to commit such vexations within its walls; but freedom and independence are to the feeble mere words. During the period of his friendship for Voltaire, Frederic, in the transports of enthusiasm, has often kissed his hands; and Voltaire, after his imprisonment, comparing the two periods, said to his friends—"He has a hundred times kissed the hand he so lately manacled."

The only work he published at Berlin was the age of Louis XIV. which is the sole history of that reign, which can be read. On the authority of the old courtiers

courtiers of Louis XIV. or of those who had lived in intimacy with them, he there relates a small number of anecdotes selected with discernment, and such as serve to paint the spirit and character of the persons of the age. Political and military events are given in a rapid, interesting manner ; the picture abounds with bold strokes. In some chapters, he recounts the attempts which Louis XIV. made for the improvement of the laws and finances, and for the encouragement of trade and industry ; and we ought to pardon Voltaire for having, on this occasion, followed the opinions of the most enlightened men
of

of his own times, instead of that knowledge which did not then exist.

His chapters on Calvinism, Jansenism, Quietism, and the dispute on the Chinese ceremonies, are models of the manner in which a prudent friend of truth ought to treat these maladies so disgraceful to man, when the number or the power of the diseased is such as to make it necessary gently to raise the veil which conceals their deformity. We have only to reproach him with too much severity against the Calvinists, whose enormities proceeded from self-defence, and whose crimes were but a kind of reprisal of juridical murders

committed on ~~them~~ in certain provinces.



The discoveries made in the sciences, and the progress of the arts, Voltaire related with clearness, precision, and impartiality ; and his decisions continually appeared dictated by a free and sound mind, and a mild indulgent philosophy.

The catalogue of the writers of the age of Louis XIV. was an original thought. It had never before entered the imagination, thus, by a trait or a few lines, to paint men of literature, ¹⁴philosophers, and poets, without dryness

ness or affectation, with taste seldom mistaken, and accuracy ever poignant.

The work brought foreign nations acquainted with Louis XIV. among whom he had been disfigured by a multitude of libels, and taught them to respect a people whom they had previously viewed through the false medium of prejudice, jealousy, and hatred. The countrymen of Voltaire were less indulgent. Such as were slaves from condition or character were highly offended that a Frenchman should dare to discover follies in Louis XIV. Prejudiced people were angry at the freedom with which he treated the mis-

takes of generals, and the defects of great writers ; and others, who in some respects were more just, reproached him with too much indulgence or enthusiasm. But history is never impartially judged in the country to which it relates, the decisions of whose inhabitants are continually perverted by jarring interests and pre-conceived false ideas.

Voltaire passed near two years in Alsatia, during which he published his Annals of the Empire, the only chronologic ridgement which can be read without weariness, because it is written in  rapid style and abounds with philosophic

lofophic deductions, expreffed with energy. Thus Voltaire has given a model of that kind of writing, the merit and utility of which his friendship for the Prefident Hénault induced him to exaggerate.

He thought, at first, of fettling in Alfatia; but, unfortunately, the Jefuits attempted to convert him, and, not fucceeding, began to diffeminate calumniating rumours which befpoke perfecution. Voltaire endeavoured to obtain not permiffion to return to Paris, for this he had never been forbidden, but an affurance that he fhould not be difagreeable to the court. He knew France

too well not to be sensible that, odious as he was by his love of truth to all powerful bodies, he must soon become the object of their persecution, would the court suffer him to be oppressed.

The answer was not to his satisfaction. Voltaire found himself unprotected in his own country, though his name supported its honour, at that time degraded throughout Europe by ridiculous quarrels concerning Billets of Confession ; and at the very moment when, by his publication of the Age of Louis the XVth, he had erected a monument to its glory. He determined to go and drink the waters of Aix, in Savoy.

Savoy. Passing through Lyons, Cardinal de Tençin, famous for the conversion of Lafs and the council of Embrun, informed him he could not invite him to dinner, because Voltaire was out of favour at court. But the inhabitants of that opulent city, in which the spirit of trade has not effaced the love of letters, recompensed him for the politic incivility of their archbishop. He there received those honours which public enthusiasm pays to genius. His pieces were played before him, amid the loud acclamations of a people, inebriated with the joy of possessing the man to whom they were indebted for such dignified pleasures. But he durst not fix

his abode at Lyons; the conduct of the Cardinal informed him he was not far enough from his enemies.

Passing through Geneva, to consult with Tronchin, the beauty of the country, the equality which appeared to prevail there, the advantage of being out of France, and in a city where French was the language of the people, the freedom of thought which was greater than in a monarchical or catholic country, and the liberty of the press, founded indeed less on the laws than on the interests of trade, all determined him to fix his retreat in that place,

But

But he soon perceived that a city in which the pedantic and austere spirit of Calvin had taken deep root, where the vanity of imitating ancient republics, and the jealousy of the poor against the rich had established sumptuary laws, where theatrical exhibitions offended both Calvinistic fanaticism, and republican rigour, would to him neither be a safe nor an agreeable residence. He determined to procure a place of refuge in the territories of Geneva against Catholic persecution, and a retreat in France against puritanical gloom, and accordingly to live alternately at Tournay, since called Ferney, in France, and the *Delices* at the gates of Geneva.

Here

Here he fixed his abode with Madame Dennis his niece ; who, being a widow without children, was free to indulge her friendship for her uncle, and to acknowledge the kindness with which he had rendered her circumstances easy. She took on herself the charge of his domestic affairs ; and, to increase his tranquillity, by relieving him from such fatiguing trifles. This was the only aid he received ; labour was to him an inexhaustible source of enjoyment ; and freedom was all he wanted to render his moments happy.

Hitherto, we have written the tempestuous life of a philosophic poet,
 whose

whose love for truth, and whose independence of character had occasioned him more enemies than friends, who gave no reply to their malice except by epigrams which were either witty or dreadfully severe, and whose conduct had more frequently been guided by the sensations of the moment than the result of any plan which reason had formed.

In his present retirement, removed from illusion and whatever could excite momentary or personal passion, we shall see him yield entirely to his prevailing and incessant love of fame, to the still more potent necessity his
mind

mind felt of being productive, and to his zeal for the destruction of prejudice, which was indeed the most powerful and active of all the sensations he felt. This peaceful life, seldom disturbed, and then by the threats of persecution, rather than persecution itself, we shall see adorned not only, like his youth, by the exercise of private benevolence, a quality common to all men whose hearts have not been hardened and minds corrupted by misfortune or vanity, but by those acts of enlightened and bold benevolence, which, while they relieve the sufferings of certain individuals, are of service to the whole human race.

And

And hence it was that, indignant to behold a corrupt minister pursue the the unfortunâte Byng to death that he might conceal his own errors and flatter the pride of the English populace, Voltaire, in order to rescue this innocent victim from the Machiavelian arts of Pitt, employed every means which genius and compassion could inspire, and singly raised his voice against injustice ; while astonished Europe in silence saw such an example of atrocity worthy of the most barbarous times, which England dared to give in this age of humanity and knowledge.

The first work he sent from his retreat was the Orphan of China, a tragedy

gedy written during his residence in Alfatia, at a time when he hoped he might have been allowed to live at Paris, and was desirous of theatrical success to secure his friends and impose silence on his foes.

In the commencement of the tragic art, poets were certain of astonishing the mind by giving to their characters sentiments contrary to nature, and by sacrificing the true feelings of the heart to the more uncommon love of fame, exaggerated patriotism, and devotedness to princes.

As reason, at such a period, is even inferior to taste, vulgar opinion seconds such

such as employ those means, or are seduced by them. Leontine necessarily inspires admiration ; and the haughtiness of his character induces an audience, who idolize their king, to pardon him the sacrifice of his son. But when means like these, of producing effects by a departure from nature, begin to be exhausted, and when art improves, the poet is then obliged to write more conformably to reason, and seek resources in nature herself. Yet, such is the force of habit, the sacrifice of Zamti, founded indeed on more dignified and powerful motives than that of Leontine, expiated by tears and regret, seduced the spectators.

Astonish

Astonishment only was excited at the first representation of the Orphan, by the following truly philosophic lines :

*La Nature et l'Hymen, voilà les lois premières,
Les devoirs, les liens des nations entières ;
Ces lois viennent des dieux, le reste est des humains*.*

The audience hesitated, and the voice of nature needed the aid of reflection in order to be heard. Thus can a great poet sometimes decide the mind between ancient errors and truths, which, to vanquish wavering yet still opposing prejudice, is obliged to wait for new support. Men often dare not

* Nature and Hymen first gave laws to earth ;
Their origin divine, the rest is human all.

confess to themselves that slow progress which reason makes in their minds; but they are ready to follow her when, appearing in a strong and effective manner, they are obliged to acknowledge her presence. Thus, these same verses have since been continually heard with transport, and Voltaire enjoyed the pleasure of having avenged nature.

This play is the triumph of virtue over power, and of the laws over arms. Till then, Mahomet excepted, no poet had successfully made one of these men, whose fame appears awful, and whose characters present the picture of ex-

traordinary strength of soul, in love without degradation. Voltaire, a second time conquered this difficulty; the love of Gengis Khan is interesting in despite of the violence and ferocity of his character, because it is true and impassioned, because it wrests from him a confession of the vacancy his heart felt amid all his power, and because he at last sacrifices his love to fame, and his thirst of conquest to the charms, before unknown to him, of pacific virtues.

The repose of Voltaire was soon disturbed by the publication of the *Maid of Orleans*. This poem, in which licentiousness

centiousness and philosophy are combined, and truth assumes the mask of satiric and voluptuous humour, was begun about the year 1730, but had never been finished. The author had intrusted what he had written of it only to a few of his friends, and to some princes. The rumour of its existence had brought down menace on him ; and, by not finishing it, he took the surest means to avoid the dangerous temptation of making it public. Copies unfortunately got abroad, one of which fell into inimical and selfish hands, and the work appeared not only with such defects as the author had left, but with lines added by the editors full of gross-

ness and ill taste, and with satiric traits which might endanger the safety of Voltaire. The desire of gain, the pleasure of attributing their own wretched verses to a great poet, and the more malignant pleasure of exposing him to persecution, were the motives of this act of infidelity, the honour of which was divided between la Beaumelle and the Ex Capuchin Maubert.

They succeeded only so far as to trouble that repose for a moment which they wished to destroy. His friends evaded the persecution, by proving the work to be spurious, and the hatred
of

of the editors served him whom it meant to wound.

This, however, obliged Voltaire to finish the poem, and present a work to the world, at which the author of *Mahomet* and the age of Louis XIV. need not blush. The work excited lively feelings of enthusiasm in a numerous class of readers, while the foes of Voltaire affected to decry it as unworthy of a philosopher, and almost as a blemish on the writings and the life of a poet.

But, if it be useful to render superstition ridiculous in the eyes of

men addicted to voluptuousness, and by the very weakness which hurries them into dissipation destined some time to become the unfortunate victims or the dangerous tools of this vile tyrant of men, if affectation of austerity in manners, if the excessive value attached to their purity, be serviceable only to hypocrites who, wearing the mask of chastity, may neglect every other virtue, and cast a sacred veil over the most pernicious vices of society, such as intolerance and persecution, if accustoming the world to regard those errors from which men of honour and conscience are not exempt as crimes, the power of that dangerous sect, who govern

govern and disturb the world be extended over the purest minds by their having exclusively rendered themselves the interpreters of celestial justice, we shall then only behold in the author of the Maid of Orleans the foe of hypocrisy and superstition.

Voltaire himself, when speaking of la Fontaine, has well remarked that works, in which voluptuousness and humour are mingled, amuse without heating or seducing the imagination. And if such works be sources of pleasure to the fancy, which lighten the uneasy moments of life, diminished the misfortunes of privation, unbend a mind

fatigued by labour, and fill up moments in which the weary and funken soul can neither act nor meditate with effect, wherefore rob men of an aid which nature presents ? What will be the effect of such reading ? No other than that of disposing men to more mildness and indulgence. It was not such books that Gérard or Clement read ; or that the scouts of Cromwell carried in the pommels of their saddles.

Two works very different in themselves appeared at the same epoch : the poem on Natural Law, and the poem of the Destruction of Lisbon. To display morals, the principles of which
reason

reason teaches all men, which are sanctioned by their hearts, and which remorse informs them it is their duty to practice; to shew that these are the principles which God, the common father of men, alone could impart, since they alone are uniform; to prove that the duty of individuals is mutually to pardon their mistakes, and that of sovereigns to prevent the pernicious tendency of those vain opinions which fanaticism and hypocrisy support, by wisely treating them all with indifference; such is the purport of the poem on Natural Law.

This work, the finest which man ever consecrated to the Deity, excited
the

the anger of the devotees, who called it the poem of Natural Religion; though religion is only mentioned in order to oppose intolerance, and though there is no such a thing as natural religion. It was burnt by the parliament of Paris, which began to be terrified, as well at the progress of reason as at that of Molinism. Under the conduct, at this period, of men who were either blinded by pride or false policy, it imagined it would be more easy to impede the advancement of knowledge than to merit the applause of the enlightened. It felt not the want itself had of the good opinion of the public; it misconstrued those who were to be
its

its guides, and declared itself the enemy of men letters, at that precise moment when the suffrage of these men in France, and even over all Europe, began to acquire influence.

However the poem of Voltaire, which has since been commented on in various celebrated books, is still that in which the connexion between morality and the being of a God is most clearly demonstrated. Thirty years later and the book which was burnt as impious would almost have appeared a work of religion.

In the poem on the Destruction of Lisbon, Voltaire indulged those sentiments

ments of terror and melancholy which this dreadful accident inspired. He led the tranquil sect of Optimists amid these fearful ruins, combated their cold and puerile doctrine with the indignation of a philosopher deeply sensible of the sufferings of mankind, exposed the difficulties on the origin of evil in their full force, and avowed it is impossible for them to be solved by man.

This poem, in which at the age of more than sixty the mind of Voltaire, warmed by a love of humanity, displays all the strength and fire of youth, was not the only work in which he
opposed

opposed Optimism. He published *Candide*, the first of philosophic romances; which species of writing he brought from England, and added to its perfection. It is a kind of composition which appears easy of execution, but it requires an uncommon talent; that of expressing by a jest, a flight of the fancy, or by the incidents of the romance, the result of profound philosophy, without ceasing to be natural, pleasing, and accurate. Hence it is necessary to select such effects as need neither developement nor proof, and at once to avoid common place unworthy of repetition, and abstraction which is too deep or too new, and which is

not adapted to the multitude : that is, it is necessary to be, without appearing to be, a philosopher.

We may add, few books of philosophy are more useful. Such romances are read by frivolous men, whom the very name of philosopher disgusts or renders gloomy, and who, however, it is requisite should be freed from prejudice, and made the opponents of the herd who are interested in its defence. The human race would be condemned to eternal error if, to free them from it, it were necessary to study and understand the proofs of truth. Fortunately the native intelligence of the

the mind is sufficient for the comprehending of those simple truths which are the most essential. It is therefore sufficient to discover some means of fixing the attention of the indolent, and of engraving these truths in their memory; and this is the great use of philosophic romances, and the merit of those in which Voltaire has alike surpassed his imitators and his models.

Candide was soon followed by a free translation of the book of Ecclesiastes, and a part of the song of Solomon.

Madame de Pompadour had been persuaded that it would be profoundly
 politic

politic for her to assume the mask of devotion, by which she might shield herself from the scruples and inconstancy of the king; and at the same time calm the hatred of the people. She wished to make Voltaire an actor in this farce. The duke de la Valiere proposed to him to translate the Psalms, the book of Proverbs, Solomon's song, and the Ecclesiastes. The edition was to have been printed at the Louvre, and the author to have returned to Paris under the protection of the religious favorite. But Voltaire could not act the hypocrite, not even to be made a cardinal, some hopes of which were given him about this time. Such proposals

proposals generally come too late ; and were they made in time the policy of them would not be very certain. He who must be a dangerous enemy might become a still more dangerous ally. Let us suppose Calvin or Luther called to the purple, when they might have accepted the dignity without disgrace, and let us imagine what would have been the consequence. The baubles of vanity do not satiate souls impelled by the ambition of reigning over the minds of men ; they do but supply new arms.

Voltaire, however, was tempted to make essays in translation ; not to re-

cover his religious repute, but to exercise himself in another species of composition. When they appeared, the devout imagined he only had intended to parody that which he had translated, and exclaimed it was shameful. They did not imagine that Voltaire had softened and purified the text; that his *Ecclesiastes* had less of the doctrine of materialism than the original; and that his song of songs was less indecent than the sacred text. These works were therefore once more burnt, for which Voltaire avenged himself by a satiric and humourous letter, in which he mocked at the hypocrisy of morals, the peculiar vice of the modern nations

of Europe, which has contributed more than is imagined to destroy that energy of character by which the ancients were distinguished.

In 1757, the first edition of his works, actually made under his own inspection, was printed. He revised it with rigorous attention, selected some of his numerous fugitive pieces with severity, but with judgment, and added his immortal *Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations*.

Voltaire had long complained that among the moderns especially, the history of a country was that of its

R 2 kings,

kings, or its chiefs; that it spoke only of wars, treaties, and civil commotions; and that the history of morals, arts, sciences, legislation, and political government, had been almost forgotten. Those very ancients in whose writings we find most of morals, and internal politics, have only in general added, to the history of wars, that of popular factions. We imagine, while we read such historians, that the human race was created only to exhibit the political or military talents of a few individuals; and that the object of society is not the happiness of the species, but the pleasure of having revolutions to read, or to relate.

Voltaire

Voltaire formed the plan of a history which should contain all that was most important for men to know: such as the effects produced on the peace and happiness of nations, their prejudices, knowledge, virtues, and vices, and the customs and the arts of different ages.

He chose the period from Charlemagne to the present century; but, not confining himself solely to European nations, he interested and instructed the reader by an abridged retrospect of the state of the other parts of the globe; the revolutions they had undergone,

and the opinions by which they had been governed.

It was to reconcile Madame du Chatelet to the study of history, that he had undertaken this immense labour, which obliged him to read books of erudition, such as would have been supposed incompatible with the liveliness of his fancy, and the activity of his mind. The supposition that he should serve the human race supported him, and erudition was not dull to a man who, having the sagacity to detect and amuse himself with the ridiculous, found an inexhaustible source of this
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in the speculative or practical doctrines of our ancestors; and in the follies of those who have transmitted or commented on them, while admiring them either with sincerity or hypocrisy equally laughable.

Such a work could please none but philosophers. It was accused of being frivolous, because it was clear, and read without labour; and of being inaccurate, because there are some errors of names and dates discoverable in it, which in themselves are things absolutely indifferent. Yet it has been proved, by the very reproaches of his bitterest critics, that, in a history so

extensive, no writer was ever more exact. He was often taxed with partiality, because he exclaimed against those prejudices which pusillanimity or meanness had too long respected; and it is easy to shew that, far from exaggerating the crimes of sacerdotal despotism, he has rather diminished their number, and softened their atrocity. In fine, it was taken amiss that, in a picture of the wickedness and folly of man, he has sometimes indulged in strokes of pleasantry; and that he has not always spoken seriously of human extravagance; as if that which is often dangerous ceased therefore to be absurd.

These

These prejudices, which it was the interest of powerful bodies to disseminate, are not yet eradicated. The habit of generally seeing dulness and precision combined, and, by the side of critical decision of finding the insipid scaffolding on which it was reared, has given birth to the other habit of thinking nothing accurate which is not pedantic. We are accustomed to see gloomy stupidity accompany historical precision; as we see men of certain professions always clothed in black. But men of genius derive no satisfaction from a merit which fools can claim as easily as themselves; and this merit they are supposed not to possess, because
they

they alone forbear to vaunt of it. *The Travels of the young Anacharsis* will perhaps efface this too commonly received opinion.

But the essay of Voltaire will ever remain, to men of reason, a work delightful by the choice of its materials, by the rapidity of its style, by that love of truth and humanity which is conspicuous in every page, and by the art of presenting contrasted pictures, and unexpected similarities, without ceasing to be easy and natural; as well as by deducing, in language ever simple, grand consequences, and making profound reflections. The author has
not

not given the history of ages, but that which we wish to remember of history; that which the mind delights to recollect.

Few books would be more useful, in a rational plan of education. While we read the facts, we here are taught the art of judging them truly, of exercising the native independence of the mind, without which man is but the servile instrument of prejudice, and of contemning superstition, fearing fanaticism, detesting intolerance, and hating tyranny, without ceasing to love peace, and that mildness of manners which is as necessary to the happiness of

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of mankind as is the wisdom of legislation itself.

Hitherto, in private or public education, which alike are guided by prejudice, youth have studied history as disfigured by vile or superstitious compilers ; and though, since the publication of the essay of Voltaire, two men, the Abbé de Condillac and the Abbé Millot, have merited not to be numbered in this class, yet, restrained by their situation, they have left the reader too much to divine : in order to understand them, we ought not to have any need of their instruction.

This

This work placed Voltaire in the class of original historians; and he has the honour of having effected a revolution in the manner of writing history, by which England indeed has hitherto only profited. Hume, Robertson, Gibbon, and Watson, may, in some respects, be considered as his scholars. The history of Voltaire has another advantage: which is, that it may be taught in England as well as in Russia, and in Virginia as consistently as at Bern or Venice. He has inserted none but such truths as every species of government may adopt. He only requires that human reason should have the right of improving itself; that the citizen should
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enjoy his natural freedom; and that the laws should be mild and the religion tolerant. He addresses himself to all mankind, and says nothing which may not enlighten them all, without offence to any of those opinions which are so connected with the constitution and individual interest of a country as not to yield to reason, till such time as the destruction of more general error shall have rendered the approach of truth less difficult.

In this edition, Voltaire had prefixed to his fugitive pieces of poetry an epistle addressed to his house of the *De-lices*; or, rather, it was an ode to liberty,
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and sufficed to answer those who, in the height of their aristocratic zeal, had accused him of being the enemy of liberty. In these pieces, in which refined gaiety, delicate feeling, and gallantry successively appear, Voltaire fought not to be a poet; yet every species of poetic beauty flowed from his pen when he thought not of them; he did not endeavour to display philosophy, yet throughout the whole is to be found whatever is suited to the subject, to the situation, and the characters. In such poetic effusions, as in romances, the philosophy of the work should appear less extensive than the philosophy of the author. It is with these

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these writings as with elementary books which cannot be well written if the author's knowledge does not embrace more than that which they contain; and therefore, although these works are regarded as frivolous, those of them which stand in the first rank are produced only by men of a superior mind.

This same year was the epoch of a reconciliation between Voltaire and his royal disciple; the Austrians, already in the heart of Silesia, were on the point of completing the conquest of it; a French army was on the frontiers of Brandenbourg; the Russians, masters of Prussia, threatened to over-

run Pomerania and the marches. The Prussian monarchy seemed to be annihilated; and the prince, who had been the author of its splendour, appeared to have no other resource than to inter himself beneath its ruins, and to preserve his glory by perishing in the moment of a victory.

The Margraves of Bareith tenderly loved her brother, the destruction of her house afflicted her, she saw how greatly France opposed her own interests while she lavished her blood and treasures to secure the sovereignty of Germany to the house of Austria; but the French minister had suffered from

a verse of the King of Prussia, nor could the Marchioness de Pompadour pardon his having feigned an ignorance of her political existence, and care had been taken to send to her also some verses which had fallen into the hand of the minister of the Elector of Saxony, through the treachery of a person employed to copy them. However there was a necessity of negotiating with enemies, embittered by personal insults, and at the very moment in which they thought themselves secure of an easy victory. The margraves had recourse to Voltaire, who addressed himself to the Cardinal de Tencin, knowing that this minister,

forgotten since the death of Fleury who employed while he despised him, had preserved a private correspondence with the king. Tençin wrote; but the only answer he received was the order of the minister for foreign affairs to reject the negociation by a letter, of which they had even sent him a copy. The aged politician, who would not formerly invite Voltaire to his table in deference to the court, could not banish his chagrin when he found that he had offended the court by his complaisance to Voltaire; and it shortened his days. In his youth, more perilous adventures had only served to animate his talent for intrigue, because then hope sustain-

ed him, and he was among the number of men who find in power and rank a consolation for shame ; but, in this affair, he beheld the last thread destroyed which connected him with royal power.

Voltaire commenced another negotiation, through the medium of the Marechal de Richelieu, but it was equally fruitless. A third, some years latter, was so far successful as to obtain the consent of M. de Choiseul to receive a secret envoy from the King of Prussia. This envoy was discovered by the agents of the empress queen, and either through the inconstancy of the French minister, or that M. de Choiseul had

had acted without consulting Madame de Pompadour, he was arrested and his papers searched : a violation of the law of nations which is forgotten in the multitude of inferior crimes which politicians commit without remorse.

During this period, so dangerous and so glorious to the King of Prussia, Voltaire appeared at one time to re-assume his former influence over the monarch, at another to preserve nothing but the remembrance of the affair of Frankfort ; and it was then that he wrote those remarkable Memoirs*

* We have added them as an appendix to this life.

in which neither good humour nor justice are lost in the lively recollection of a just resentment. Voltaire had nobly condemned them to oblivion: chance preserved them to avenge genius for the outrages of power.

The Margraves of Bareith died in the midst of the war. The King of Prussia wrote to Voltaire, and requested him to confer an immortality on the name of his sister, of which her mild and amiable virtues, her soul equally superior to prejudices, to grandeur, and misfortune, had rendered her worthy. The ode, which Voltaire consecrated to her memory, breathes a soft sensibility,

lity, and a simple interesting philosophy. This species of composition is one of those in which he was the least successful, because it requires a degree of perfection which he could never resolve to aim at in trifling works, and because his reason could not yield at pleasure to that enthusiasm which is said to be the characteristic of the ode. The odes of Voltaire are only fugitive pieces, in which we find the great and philosophic poet, but in which we perceive him embarrassed and constrained by a form which ill agreed with the fire of his genius. However, it must be owned that his verses addressed to a

princess on gaming, and, still more, the charming stanzas on old age :

*Si vous voulez que j'aime encore, &c.**

are Anacreontic odes, much superior to those of Horace, who nevertheless has, at least in the opinion of people of a somewhat modern taste, surpassed his model.

France, so superior to other nations in tragedy and comedy, has not been equally happy in lyric poets. The odes of Rousseau scarcely present us with any thing more than a seductive and harmonious poetry, which is void of ideas or filled with false thoughts.

* If you wish that I still should love you, &c.

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La Motte, more ingenious, was yet a stranger to the harmony and the graces of style ; and we scarcely cite the verses of any other poet.

Voltaire was still at Berlin when Diderot and d'Alembert formed the design of writing the Encyclopedia, and published the first volume of it. A work whose object it was to include the truths of all the sciences, and to trace the lines of communication between them, undertaken by two men who joined much wit and a free daring philosophy to extensive and profound knowledge, appeared to the penetrating eye of Voltaire the most formidable

midable stroke that could be aimed at ignorance and prejudice. The Encyclopedia became the book of all men who wished to instruct themselves, but particularly of those who, without being habitually employed in cultivating their mind, yet are desirous of the power of acquiring a ready information on every object which excites in them either a transient or durable interest. It was a mass to which those, who had not time to form ideas for themselves, might have recourse for the ideas of the most enlightened and celebrated ^{fr}writers; in which, in short, the errors, that are respected by prejudice, would either be betrayed by the weakness

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ness of their proofs, or shaken by the near neighbourhood of truths which sap their foundations.

Voltaire, having retired to Ferney, gave a small number of literary articles to the Encyclopedia ; he prepared some of those on philosophic subjects, but with less zeal, because he felt that the editors had less need of his assistance there, and because that, in general, though his great works in verse had been formed to constitute his glory, he had scarcely ever written in prose but with views of universal utility. Mean while, the same reasons which interested Voltaire for the progress of
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the Encyclopedia raised that work innumerable enemies. Composed or applauded by the greatest men of the nation, it became a species of line which separated the most distinguished literati, and those who had the honour of being their disciples or their friends, from that crowd of obscure and jealous writers, who, in the sorrowful incapacity of giving either new truths or new pleasures to the world, hate and calumniate men to whom nature has been more bountiful.

A work in which it was necessary to treat freely and boldly of divinity, of morality, of jurisprudence, of legislation,

tion, and of public economy, could not but terrify all religious or political parties, and all the subordinate powers which feared to see their pretensions and utility discussed. The insurrection was general. The journal of Trévoux, the ecclesiastic gazette, the satiric journals, the Jesuits and the Janfenists, the clergy, the parliaments, all, without ceasing to hate or oppose each other, united against the Encyclopaedia, and it fell. The editors were obliged to finish and to print, in secret this work, to whose perfection liberty and publicity were so essential; and one of the noblest undertakings which the human mind has ever conceived,

would

would have remained unfinished but for the courage of Diderot, and the zeal of a great number of men of distinguished learning, whom persecution could not deter.

Happily, the honour of having given the Encyclopedia to Europe, compensated France for the shame of having opposed its progress. It was, with justice, regarded as the work of the nation, and its persecution as that of a policy and jealousy equally despicable.

But the contests which the Encyclopedia had occasioned did not cease with the proscription of that work.

Its

Its principal authors and their friends, marked by the name of *philosophers* and *Encyclopedists*, which was designed as an approbrium by the enemies of reason, were compelled to unite even by this very persecution, and Voltaire naturally became their leader by his age, his celebrity, his zeal, and his genius. He had long before enjoyed some friends and a great number of admirers; at that period, he had a party. The persecution rallied, under his standard all the men of merit, whom, perhaps, his superiority would have kept at a distance from him, as it had banished their predecessors; and enthusiasm took the place of former injustice.

It

It was in the year 1760 that this literary war was most violent. Le Franc de Pompignan, an estimable man of letters but an indifferent poet, of whose works there remain a fine stanza, and a feeble tragedy in which the combined genius of Virgil and Metastasio could not yield him sufficient support, was elected one of the French academy. Cloathed with the honours of magistracy, he thought that his dignity, as well as his works, exempted him from all gratitude; in the discourse, which he delivered at his admission, he permitted himself to insult the men whose names did the greatest honour to the society that condescended to receive him;

him; and, clearly pointing out Voltaire, accused him of infidelity and falshood. Soon after, Paliflot, the venal instrument of the rancour of a woman, exhibited the philosophers on the ftage. The laws, which prohibit the ridiculing individuals at the theatre, were filent. The magiftrates betrayed their duty, and faw, with a malignant joy, men, whose knowledge and influence on public opinion they dreaded, immolated in the fcene, without recollecting that while they opened the way to fatire they expofed themfelves to its shafts. Crébillon difgraced his old age, by approving the piece. The duke de Choifeul, then the favourite

minister, countenanced this indignity, through a weak complaisance to the same woman, of whose resentment Palliot was the instrument. The journals repeated the insults of the theatre. Still Voltaire combated all. The Poor Devil, the Russian at Paris, Vanity, a crowd of humorous pieces in prose succeeded each other with astonishing rapidity.

Le Franc de Pompignan complained to the king, and to the academy, and beheld, with an impotent grief, that his own name was obscured by the splendour of that of Voltaire. Each step he
took

took did but increase the satire, which every tongue repeated, and the verses in which he is consigned to eternal ridicule. He made a formal proposal to an august patron, to break a promise which he had made to this patron himself, by returning to the academy, to vote for a man, in whose behalf the prince was interested. He received, in return for this sacrifice, a polite refusal, and had the mortification to hear his patron himself repeat, as he withdrew, the lines so terrible to him :

Et l'ami Pompignan pense être quelque chose!*

* What, does friend Pompignan think himself somebody !

and he retired to bury his humbled pride and deceived ambition in the country: a fearful, but salutary, example of the power of genius and the dangers of literary hypocrisy.

Fréron, an ex-jesuit as well as Deffontaines, had succeeded the latter in the trade of flattering, by periodical satires, the jealousy of the enemies of virtue, of reason, and of talents. He distinguished himself in the war against the philosophers. Voltaire, who had long supported his outrages, at length did justice, and avenged his friends. In the comedy of *l'Ecoffaise* (the Scotch-woman), he introduced a depraved
 2 journalist,

journalist, whose character was formed of venality and rancour. The pit, in the character, recognized Fréron, who, delivered over to public disdain in a piece which could not fail to be preserved to the theatre by interesting scenes, and the original and forcible character of the worthy blunt Freeport, was condemned to bear, during the remainder of his life, a ridiculous and disgraced name. Fréron, in applauding the insult offered to the philosophers, had forfeited his right of complaining ; and his protectors chose rather to abandon him than to avow a partiality which might have involved their own discredit.

Other enemies, less virulent, had been either corrected or punished; and Voltaire, triumphing in the midst of these victims sacrificed to reason and to his glory, sent to the theatre, at the age of sixty-six, the *chef-d'œuvre* of Tancréd. That tragedy was dedicated to the Marchioness de Pompadour. It was the fruit of the address with which Voltaire could, without wounding the Duke de Choiseul, support the cause of the philosophers, whose adversaries had obtained a slight protection from that minister. This dedication taught his enemies that their calumnies were not more injurious to his security than their

their criticisms to his fame: it completed his vengeance.

In this same year he learned that a young niece of Corneille languished in a condition unworthy of his name; "It is the duty of a soldier" he cried, "to succour the niece of his general." Mademoiselle Corneille was invited to Ferney; and she there received an education suitable to the rank that her birth had marked for her in society. Voltaire even carried his delicacy so far as not to suffer the establishment of Mademoiselle Corneille to appear as his benefaction. He wished that she should owe that to the works of her uncle, and

he undertook to publish an edition of them with notes. The creator of the French Theatre commented on by the writer who had conducted that theatre to its perfection, a man of genius, born at a time when taste was not yet formed, judged by a rival who joined to genius the gift, almost as rare, of a taste that was penetrating without severity, delicate without timidity, and enlightened by a long and happy experience of the art, these are the beauties presented in that work, Voltaire speaks in it of Corneille's defects with frankness, of his beauties with enthusiasm. Never has Corneille been examined with such rigour, never has he
been

been praised with a feeling more profound and true. Resolved to instruct both the French youth and the youth of other countries who cultivate the French literature, he did not pardon the vices of language, the extravagance, nor the offences committed against delicacy and good taste, which are found in Corneille ; but, at the same time, he taught them to know the progress which the art owes to that writer, the uncommon elevation of his mind, the almost inimitable beauty of his poetry in the morcels dictated by his genius, and those vast, sublime, words which spring suddenly from the necessity of
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the occasion, and paint great characters with a single stroke.

The herd of writers reproached him, nevertheless, with a design of degrading Corneille, from motives of mean jealousy; whereas, throughout the whole of his commentary, he seizes, he even seems to seek, occasion to proclaim his admiration of Racine; a more dangerous rival, whom he has surpassed only in some parts of the tragic art, and whose prodigious excellence he might well envy in the height of his glory.

Voltaire, tranquil in his retreat, employed in continuing the happy war
which

which he had declared against prejudice saw the arrival of an unfortunate family, the father of which had been conducted to the wheel by fanatic judges; the instruments of the ferocious passions of a superstitious people. He learnt that Calas, an infirm old man, had been accused of having hanged his young and vigorous son, in the midst of his family, and in the presence of a catholic servant; that he had been urged to commit this crime by the fear of seeing this son embrace the catholic religion, this son who spent his life in dissipation, and of whom no one in the midst of the universal effervescence could ever cite a single word, or point to

to a single action which announced such a design, while another son of Calas already converted to the catholic faith enjoyed a pension from the bounty of this father, who was far from possessing affluence. Never, in an event of such a nature, had circumstances so concurred to banish the suspicion of a crime in the father, or to strengthen the reasons to ascribe suicide to the son. The young man's conduct, his character, the kind of reading in which he indulged, all confirmed this idea. Yet a magistrate, whose weak mind was intoxicated with superstition, and whose hatred to the protestants did not hesitate to impute crimes to them, caused
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the whole family to be imprisoned. The catholic populace became enflamed, and the young man was declared a martyr. The fraternity of the penitents, which, to the disgrace of the nation, still exists at Thoulouse, performed a solemn mass for him, during which they bore his effigies, holding the palm of martyrdom in one hand, and in the other the pen with which he was to have signed his abjuration.

It was soon reported that the protestant religion commanded fathers to assassinate their children, when they designed to abjure it; and that, for greater security, they elected, in their
secret

secret assemblies the butcher of the sect: The inferior tribunal, led by the furious M. David, pronounced the unfortunate Calas guilty ; and the parliament confirmed the sentence by that very small majority which is unhappily regarded as sufficient by our absurd jurisprudence. Condemned to the torture and the wheel, this miserable father died protesting his innocence ; and the judges absolved his family, the necessary accomplices of the guilt, or the innocence of its head.

This family, ruined and stained by prejudice, went to seek, among men of their own persuasion, a retreat, assistance,

ance, but, above all, consolation. They took up their residence near Geneva. Voltaire, whose compassion was moved, and whose indignation was roused, informed himself of the horrible particulars ; and, assured of the innocence of the unfortunate Calas, he dared to conceive the hope of obtaining justice. The zeal of the advocates was excited, and their courage sustained by his letters. He interested, in the cause of humanity, the naturally susceptible mind of the Duke de Choiseul. The reputation of Tronchin had brought to Geneva the Duchess d'Enville, the great grand-daughter of the author of the Maxims. Superior to superstition,

both

both by her native feelings and by her acquired knowledge, informed how to produce the welfare of mankind by equal activity and courage, and embellishing by a genuine modesty the energy of her virtues, her hatred of fanaticism and oppression insured to Calas a protectress, whose zeal could not be abated by obstacles or delays. The process was commenced. To the memorials of the advocates, too profuse and declamatory, Voltaire added more nervous writings, the style of which was seductive, and calculated in some places to excite pity, and in others to awaken the public indignation, so prone to sleep among a people, at that time,

time, too much a stranger to their own interests. Pleading for Calas, he supported the cause of toleration; which word it was then daring to pronounce, and which is even now rejected with contempt by men who recognize the right of enslaving thought and conscience. Letters, abounding with that subtle praise which he could distribute with such delicacy, animated the zeal of the defenders of the cause, of its protectors, and of the judges. It was, while he promised immortality, that he demanded justice.

The sentence of Thoulouse was annulled. The Duke de Choiseul had.

the wisdom and the courage to order a tribunal of Masters of requests to revise this cause, in defending which the parliaments were all interested, whose prejudices and spirit of mutual defence left little hope of an equitable decision. In fine, Calas was declared innocent; dishonour was removed from his memory; and a generous minister caused the public treasury to repair the wrongs that the injustice of the judges had done to the fortune of this family, which was as respectable as it was unhappy. But he did not proceed so far as to compel the parliament of Languedoc to acknowledge the arret which overturned an act of its injustice. That

tribunal preferred the miserable vanity of persevering in its error, to the honour of lamenting, and repairing, the injury.

Mean while, the applauses of France and of Europe were heard at Thoulouse, and the unhappy M. *David*, sinking beneath the weight of remorse and of shame, soon lost his reason and his life. This affair, so great in itself, so important in its consequences, since it turned the attention not only of France but of other nations to the crimes of intolerance and the necessity of preventing them, this affair occupied the soul of Voltaire, during more than

three years.—“ In all this time,” said he, “ a smile has not escaped me, for which I have not reproached myself, as for a crime.” His name, which had long been dear to the enlightened friends of humanity as that of its most zealous, most indefatigable defender, this name was then blest by that multitude of citizens who, devoted to persecution during eighty years, at length heard a voice raised in their defence. Having returned to Paris in 1778, one day that the people surrounded him on the *Pont Royal*, a poor woman was asked who that man was who thus drew the crowd after him——“ Know you not,” said she, “ that he is the saviour of Calas ?”

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He was informed of this answer, and, furrounded as he was by the marks of admiration which were lavished on him, it was this by which he was most sensibly affected.

Shortly after the unfortunate death of Calas, a young woman of the same province, who, according to a barbarous custom, had been taken from her parents and shut up in a convent with a design of aiding saving grace by human means, wearied of the ill treatment that she had endured, escaped, and her body was discovered in a well. The priest who had solicited the *Lettre de Cachet*, the sisterhood who had used

with barbarity the power which it gave them over this unfortunate young woman, doubtless merited punishment; but it was on the family of this victim that fanaticism wished punishment to fall. The injurious reproach which had conducted Calas to the wheel was revived with a new fury. Sirven, fortunately, had time to fly; and, condemned to death for contumacy, he sought an asylum with the protector of Calas. But his wife, who accompanied him, fell a prey to her grief and to the fatigue of a journey, undertaken on foot, over tracts of snow.

Judicial forms required Sirven to present himself before the same parliament

ment who had shed the blood of Calas. Voltaire endeavoured to obtain other judges. The Duke de Choiseul at that time thought it necessary to respect the opinion of the parliaments who, after the decay of his influence over the Marchioness de Pompadour, and again after her death, were become useful to him, at times to free him from an enemy, and at others to afford the means of rendering himself necessary by the art with which he could appease their commotions, which he himself frequently excited.

Sirven, then, was compelled to yield to necessity, and to appear before the

tribunal of Thoulouse ; but Voltaire knew how to provide for his security, and to prepare for his success. He had disciples in the parliament ; some able advocates of Thoulouse wished to partake of the glory which those of Paris had acquired by defending Calas ; the friends of toleration were become powerful even in this very city : within a few years Voltaire's works had changed the minds of men ; they had only pitied Calas with a silent horror, Sirven found declared protectors, for which he was indebted to the eloquence of Voltaire, to the talent of opportunely infusing truth, mingled with approbation, into the feelings of those whom he designed

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to work his purposes. The friends of truth triumphed over the abettors of the penitents, and Sirven was saved.

The Jesuits had usurped the possessions of a well descended family, who, by their poverty, were prevented from recovering their rights. Voltaire gave them the means of accomplishing that; and oppressors of every kind, who, long had feared his writings, now learnt to dread his activity, his generosity, and his courage.

This last event almost immediately preceded the destruction of the Jesuits. Voltaire, educated among them, had

had maintained a correspondence with his former masters. While they were living they restrained the fury of the fraternity from any open attack, and Voltaire was respectful to the Jesuits, both in deference to the connections of his youth, and also to preserve allies in the party which at that time governed the devotees. But, after the death of these friends, wearied by the clamours of the *Journal de Trévoux*, which, by unceasing accusations of impiety seemed to call down persecutions on his head, he no longer preserved the same respect for the Jesuits, nor did his zeal for the defence of the oppressed

pressed extend to them, when they, in their turn, became oppressed.

He exulted in the destruction of an order, the friend of letters but the enemy of reason, which was desirous of destroying all talents or of drawing them into its bosom, to corrupt them, by employing them to serve its designs, and to hold the human race in infancy, in order to govern them. Yet he pitied individuals treated with barbarity by the hatred of the Jansenists; and he gave an asylum, in his own house, to a Jesuit, to point out to the devotees that true humanity knows only misfortune and forgets opinions. Father

ther Adam, to whom a sort of celebrity was given by his abode at Ferney, was not absolutely useless to his host. He played with him at chess, and he played the game with sufficient address sometimes to conceal his superiority. He also spared Voltaire labour in his learned researches; he even served him as an almoner, for Voltaire wished to oppose his fidelity in fulfilling the exterior duties of the Romish religion to the accusations, which were brought against him, of impiety.

At this period a great revolution was engendering in the human mind. Since the revival of philosophy, religion,

gion, exclusively established throughout Europe, had been attacked only in England. Leibnitz, Fontenelle, and other less celebrated philosophers, accused of free-thinking, had respected religion in their writings. Bayle, himself, by a precaution that was necessary to his safety, while he indulged himself in all objections, assumed the air of wishing to prove that revelation alone could resolve them, and of having formed the project of exalting faith by humiliating reason. In England, these attacks had little success or effect. The most powerful party in that nation judged it useful to themselves to leave the people in darkness, probably

probably because the habit of adoring the mysteries of the Bible strengthened their faith in those of the constitution ; and they honoured the established religion as a species of social advantage. Beside, in a country where the House of Commons alone led to fortune, and where the members of that house were tumultuously elected by the people, an apparent respect for their opinions must necessarily be erected into a virtue by all the ambitious.

In France, there had appeared some bold writers, but the blows which they aimed were still indirect. Even the ~~work~~ of Helvetius de l'Esprit (on the
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understanding) was only an attack on religious principles in general ; it questioned the foundations of all religions, and left the reader to draw consequences and make applications. *Emilius* appeared ; the Savoyard vicar's Profession of Faith contained nothing relative to the utility, toward morals, of the belief of a God, and the inutility of revelation, which is not to be found in the poem of Natural Law ; but the attack was open and the persons attacked were brought upon the stage under their proper name and character, and not under that of the priests of India or of Thibet. This boldness astonished Voltaire and excited his emulation,

lation. The success of *Emilius* encouraged him, nor was he terrified by the fear of persecution. Rousseau had not been persecuted at Paris had he not put his name to the work, nor at Geneva had he not maintained in another part of *Emilius* that the people possessed not the power of renouncing the right of reforming a depraved government. This doctrine authorized the citizens of that republic to overthrow the aristocracy which its magistrates had established, and which secured an hereditary authority to certain rich families.

Voltaire believed that he could successfully shun persecution by concealing
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his name ; and, by a deference to government while he directed all his force against religion, could interest even the civil power to weaken its empire. A multiplicity of works, in which he successively employed argument and humour, were dispersed throughout Europe, under the various forms which could be invented by the necessity of veiling truth, or of rendering it engaging. His zeal against religion, which he viewed as the cause of the fanaticism that had desolated Europe from the moment of its birth, the cause of the superstition that had degraded it, and as the source of the evils, which the enemies of men still

continued to inflict on them, seemed to increase his activity and his powers. "I am wearied," said he one day, "of hearing it repeated that twelve men were sufficient to establish christianity, and I wish to prove there needs but one to destroy it."

An examination of works, which Christians regarded as proceeding from inspiration, the anylization of dogmas, which have been successively introduced since the origin of that religion, the history of the ridiculous or bloody quarrels which have been excited by those, the miracles, prophecies, tales scattered through legends and ecclesiastical histories,

tories, the religious wars, the massacres ordained in the name of God, the butchers and scaffolds which, at the voice of priests, covered Europe, the blood of kings flowing from the steel of assassins, and the fanaticism which unpeopled America, all these were incessantly repeated in his works under a thousand varied forms. He excited indignation, he wrung tears from the heart, he exhausted the springs of ridicule. Men trembled at an atrocious action, they laughed at an absurdity. Voltaire did not fear frequently to place the same objects before his readers, to urge the same reasonings to them.—

“ They tell me that I repeat the same things,” he said in one of his writings, “ true: I shall repeat them till I see men reformed.”

These works, rigorously prohibited in France, in Italy, at Vienna, in Portugal, and in Spain, could not be speedily circulated; all of them could not reach every reader; but there was not an obscure corner in the provinces, there was not any nation in foreign countries, suffering under the yoke of intolerance, which did not feel the influence of some of these writings,

Men of liberal minds, who existed before only in some cities where science

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was cultivated, or among the learned and the great, were, by his voice, multiplied in all classes of society as well as in all countries. Soon perceiving their number and their strength they ventured to shew themselves, and Europe was astonished to find itself a country of Deists.

The zeal of Voltaire created him enemies in all those who had obtained, and all who expected to obtain, affluence or even subsistence from religion. Yet that party no longer possessed such men as Bossuet, Arnaud, and Nicole; those who replaced them by their talents and their acquaintance with phi-

losofhy and letters had ranged themselves with the contrary party; and the members of the clergy who approached nearest to them in ability, yielding to the desire of not-debasing themselves in the opinion of enlightened men, stood aloof or contented themselves with maintaining the political use of a belief which they would have blushed to have partaken with the people, and substituted for the credulous superstition of their predecessors a species of religious *Machiavelism*.

Defamatory writings and attacks sprang up profusely; but Voltaire, by answering alone preserved the name of these

these works, which were read by none but those to whom they were useless, and who were unwilling or unable to understand either the objections or the answers.

To the clamours of fanaticism, Voltaire opposed the protection of monarchs. The Empress of Russia, the Kings of Poland, Denmark, Sweden, and Prussia, interested themselves in his labours, perused his works, sought to deserve his approbation, and sometimes seconded his zeal for the welfare of mankind. In every country the powerful, and such ministers as sought reputation and were intent on spreading

their fame through Europe, were ambitious to enjoy the suffrage of the philosopher of Ferney, confided to him their hopes and fears for the progress of reason, and their projects for the increase of knowledge and the ruin of fanaticism. He had formed a league which included all the great men of Europe, of which he was the soul, and whose cry was, *Reason and toleration*. Did any striking injustice arise in a nation, did Voltaire hear of any act of bigotry, any insult offered to human nature, his pen exposed the guilty to Europe: and who knows how often the fear of this sure and terrible vengeance

geance has withheld the oppressor's arm?

But it was in France, more especially, that he exercised this dominion of reason. Since the affair of Calas, every victim, unjustly sacrificed or pursued by the sword of the law, found in him a protector, or an avenger.

The execution of the Count de Lally excited his indignation. The lawyers of Paris, sitting in judgement on the conduct of a general in India, a sentence of death passed without proof of a single determinate crime, nay mere suspicion produced as the gravest accusation,

cusation, a judgment pronounced on the testimony of declared enemies, on the memorial of a Jesuit who had composed two of them contradictory to each other, uncertain whether he should accuse the general or his enemies, not knowing which he hated most or which it would be most convenient to ruin; such proceedings and such a sentence could not but rouse the feelings of every friend of justice, although the calumnies heaped on the head of the unfortunate general and the horrid barbarity of dragging him to death with a gag in his mouth, should not have shaken every fibre in every heart which the

habit

habit of disposing of the lives of men had not turned to stone.

Yet, Voltaire during a long time spoke singly against this enormity. The vast number of persons employed by the East-India Company who were interested in throwing the fatal consequences of their conduct on a man who no longer existed, the powerful tribunal which had condemned the general, all those whom that body included in its suite whose voice was sold to it, the other corps, who, united with that by the same name, by common functions and like interests, regarded its cause as their own, in fine, the administration,

nistration, ashamed of the weakness or the cruel policy which sacrificed the Count de Lally to the hope of concealing in his tomb the faults which had lost India, all seemed to oppose a tardy justice. But Voltaire, by reiterated attacks on the same object, triumphed over prejudice and the interests of such as are attentive to preserve and extend its empire. Just minds needed only to be informed of the circumstances ; others, he hurried along with him ; and when the son of the Count de Lally, since so celebrated by his eloquence and courage, had attained an age at which he could demand justice, the minds of men were prepared to applaud the attempt

attempt and to solicit its execution. Voltaire was dying, when, twelve years afterward, this unjust sentence was reversed ; he heard the intelligence ; his powers sprang back to life, and he wrote—" I die content ; I see the king loves justice." The last words which were traced by that hand which had so long maintained the cause of humanity and justice.

In the same year, 1766, another arrest astonished Europe ; which, while it read the works of our philosophers, concluded that knowledge was disseminated through France, or at least through those classes of society whose

particular duty it was to inform themselves; and thought that, after a period of more than fifteen years, the brethren of Montesquieu might have had time to comprehend his principles.

The crucifix of wood, placed on the Bridge of Abbeville, was insulted, during the night. The indignation of the people was heightened and kept in action by the ridiculous ceremony of doing penance. The bishop of Amiens, governed in his old age by fanatics, and no longer capable of foreseeing the consequences of this religious farce, added to its solemnity by his presence. Mean time, the malice of a townsman
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of Abbeville directed the suspicions of the people to the Chevalier de la Barre, a young officer whose relations were of the long robe and members of the chief magistracy, and who at that time lived with his kinswoman the Abbess de Villancourt, near the gates of Abbeville. A process was commenced, and the judges of Abbeville condemned to tortures, whose horror would dismay the imagination of a canibal, the Chevalier de la Barre and d'Etallonde his friend, who had taken the precaution to fly. The Chevalier de la Barre had awaited the issue of the trial ; he had more to lose than the other by quitting France ; and relied on the protection
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of his relations who filled the first employments in the parliaments and in the council. His hopes were deceived; the family feared to attract the notice of the public toward this prosecution, instead of endeavouring to seek support from the general opinion; and, at the age of nearly seventeen, the Chevalier de la Barre was condemned, by a majority of two votes, to be beheaded, after having had his tongue cut out, and having undergone the torture.

This horrible sentence was executed; and yet the accusations were as ridiculous as the punishment was atrocious.

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He was only *vehemently* suspected to have taken a part in the adventure of the crucifix ; but he was declared to be convicted of having sung, in parties of conviviality, some of those songs which are half obscene half religious, and which notwithstanding their grossness amuse the imagination in the first years of youth by the contrast which they form with the scrupulous respect which education inspires toward the same objects ; of having recited an ode whose author was perfectly known and at that time enjoyed a pension from the king's privy purse ; of having made some genuflexions to certain libertine works which were written to the taste

of a time in which men, led astray by religious austerity, could not distinguish between pleasure and debauchery; and in fine, he was reproached with having spoken in a language worthy of those songs and those books.

These accusations were all supported by the testimony of low people who had served these young men in their parties of pleasure, and by the *Tour-râtes** of convents, who easily find cause of offence.

This sentence revolted the minds of all men; no law existed which ordain-

* Old women, who are intrusted to be door-keepers.

ed sentence of death either for the breaking of images or for that species of blasphemy of which the Chevalier de la Barre had been accused; thus the judges had exceeded even the penalties decreed by laws, 'which no enlightened man can still see fulying our criminal code without horror. There was no father of a family who had not reason to tremble, since there are few young men who escape such-like indiscretions; and the judges had condemned the unfortunate victim to a cruel death for language, in which the greatest part of them had indulged, in their youth, in which, perhaps, they still indulged, and whose children were as

culpable as he whom they had condemned.

While Voltaire's indignation was roused, his apprehensions were strongly excited. The Philosophical Dictionary had been artfully placed among the number of books before which it was said the Chevalier de la Barre had prostrated himself. His enemies wished it to be understood that the reading of Voltaire's works had been the cause of these indiscretions, which had been construed into acts of impiety. Still the danger did not prevent Voltaire from undertaking the defence of these victims of fanaticism. D'Etallonde, then a refugee

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at Wezel, obtained, through his recommendation, a commission in a Prussian regiment. The circumstances of the affair of Abbeville were unfolded to Europe in several publications; and the judges trembled, on their very seats, at the terrible judgment which they had passed, and which dragged them from their obscurity to devote them to a disgraceful immortality.

The reporting judge of Count de Lally's trial, accused of having contributed to the death of the Chevalier de la Barre, compelled to acknowledge the influence of that power which is independ-

ent of rank or situation, and which Nature has given to genius for the consolation and defence of the human race, wrote a letter in which, actuated alternately by shame and pride, he attempted to excuse himself and suffered menaces to escape him. Voltaire replied by the following historical trait :—" I forbid you," said an Emperor of China to the chief mandarin of the historians, " to mention me, henceforward, in your works." The mandarin, on this, took up his pen. " What do you now ?" said the Emperor : " I write the order which ~~your~~ your majesty has just given me."

During

During twelve years, that Voltaire survived this act of injustice, he never lost sight of the hope of obtaining reparation for it, but he had not the consolation of success. The fear of offending the parliament of Paris still bore down the love of justice ; and, at a time when the leaders of administration had a contrary interest, they were restrained by the fear of displeasing the clergy. Governments do not sufficiently know how much real importance they acquire, both with the people whom they govern and with foreign nations, by such illustrious acts of individual justice, and how much more sure the support of public opinion is

than the deference paid them by certain bodies of men, rarely capable of gratitude, and part of whose authority over the vulgar mind it would be more politic to take away by these great examples than to augment, by proving, in the respect which they themselves pay to them, the fears which such bodies inspire.

Voltaire did not, meantime, neglect the means of avoiding the storm; he diminished his domestic establishment; and secured some property which he could dispose of at pleasure, with which he might procure a new place of refuge. Such had ever been his secret design,

design, in all the arrangements which he had made of his fortune, and it would have required a league among the powers of Europe, to have deprived him of independence, and to have reduced him to want. Princes and nobles were among his debtors, who do not indeed pay with much punctuality, but he had calculated the degrees of human corruption, and he knew that these same men, though they act with little delicacy in such affairs, would find means to reimburse him during the moment of persecution, when their negligence would otherwise render them the objects of the horror and disdain

dain of Europe, indignant to behold such a man oppressed.

This persecution appeared for a time ready to burst forth. Ferney is situated in the diocese of Geneva, the titular bishop of which resides in the small town of Annecy. François de Salles, who has been raised to the rank of Saints, having formerly been the bishop, in order that the heretics might not find cause of scandal in their own metropolis, it had been thought most proper to confide this see to none but a man who would not incur the reproach of pride, luxury, and effeminacy, of which
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the catholic prelates are accused by the protestants.

But it had long been difficult to discover saints, who, possessing understanding or birth, would condescend to accept so small a diocese. He who filled the see of Annecy, in 1767, was a man of low extraction, educated in a seminary at Paris, where he was no otherwise distinguished than by austere manners, trifling devotion, and ignorant fanaticism. He wrote to the Count de St. Florentine, to induce him to banish Voltaire out of his diocese, and consequently out of the kingdom, though the poet had then built a church

church at his own expence, and spread abundance through a country which the persecutions against the protestants had laid waste. But the bishop pretended that the Lord of Ferney had given a moral exhortation against theft in the church after mass, and that the workmen who were employed by him in erecting this church had not removed an old cross with sufficient veneration; these indeed were grave inducements to drive from his country an old man who was the glory of that country, and to rob him of an asylum to which the kingdoms of Europe hastened to bear him the tribute of admiration. The minister, had it been only
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from motives of policy, could not be tempted to gratify the bishop ; he therefore advised Voltaire to guard against these accusations, which the union of the bishop of Annecy with the French prelates who possessed more influence might render dangerous.

It was at this time that he conceived the idea of solemnly receiving the sacrament, which was followed by a public declaration of his respect for the church, and his disdain of his detractors ; a fruitless step, which spoke weakness rather than policy, and which the pleasure of compelling his pastor to administer the communion through fear
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of the secular judges, and of legally insulting the bishop of Annecy, could not excuse in the eyes of the free and intrepid man who appreciates coolly the rights of truth, and perceives that which prudence requires when laws contrary to natural justice render truth dangerous and prudence necessary.

The priests suffered the small advantage to escape which they might have drawn from this singular scene, by falsifying the declaration which Voltaire had made.

He had no longer a retreat near Geneva. He had connected himself,

on his arrival there, with the families whose education, opinions, inclinations, and fortune, were most congenial to his own; and these families had at that time formed the design of establishing a species of aristocracy. In a city which possessed no territory, where the strength of the citizens could be united with as much facility and promptitude as that of the government, such a project would have been absurd had not the rich citizens entertained the hope of engaging a foreign influence in their favour.

The cabinets of Versailles and Turin were easily seduced. The senate of Bern, whose interest it was to banish the
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the picture of republican equality from the eyes of their subjects, made it their constant policy to protect every enterprising aristocracy around them; and, throughout the whole of Switzerland, such magistrates as became tyrants were sure of finding, at Bern, an ardent and faithful protector. Thus the wretched pride of obtaining an odious authority in a small city, and of being hated without being respected, deprived the citizens of Geneva of their liberty, and the republic of its independence. The chiefs of the popular party employed the weapons of fanaticism, for they had read enough to know the influence which religion had formerly

formerly obtained in political ~~disen-~~ sions, but they did not sufficiently understand the spirit of their own age to feel how much reason, aided by ridicule, had weakened this formerly so dangerous weapon.

It was proposed, therefore, to ~~put~~ in force the laws which prohibited catholics from possessing property in the territory of Geneva. The magistrates were censured for their connections with Voltaire, who had dared to raise his voice against the barbarous assassination of Servet, which had been commanded by Calvin in the name of God to the cowardly and superstitious sena-

tors of Geneva. Voltaire was obliged to renounce his house of the *Delices*.

Soon after, Rousseau advanced, in his *Emilius*, principles which developed to the citizens of Geneva all the extent of their rights, and which founded these rights on simple truths that all men could feel and all must adopt. The aristocracy wished to punish him for the publication, but it was necessary they should have a pretext; they took that of religion, and united themselves with the priests, who, in every country, indifferent to the form of its constitution and the liberty of man, promise the assistance of Heaven

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to the party which most favours intolerance, and who become, as their interest directs, sometimes the support of the tyranny of a bigotted prince or of a superstitious senate, sometimes the defenders of the liberty of a fanatic people.

Alternately exposed to the attacks of the two parties, Voltaire observed a neutrality, but he remained faithful to his detestation of oppressors. He favoured the cause of the citizens against the magistrates, and that of the common people who possessed no privileges against the citizens; for these people, condemned to be ever excluded from

the rights of the citizens, found themselves more oppressed since the latter, better informed of the privileges which is granted by the present system of polity, but less enlightened respecting the natural rights of man, considered themselves as sovereigns, of whom the people were no more than subjects, and whom they thought they had an authority to reduce to subjection, by the same arbitrary power, for assuming which they deemed their magistrates so culpable.

Voltaire, therefore, wrote a poem, every part of which was impregnated with satire, and on which no reproach

can be laid, except that of containing some verses against Rousseau, which were dictated by a degree of anger; whose excess and expressions could not be excused by the justice of the motives which inspired them. But when, in a tumult, the citizens had slain some of the people, he was eager to receive at Ferney the families which these troubles compelled to abandon Geneva; and, in the very instant in which the bankruptcy of the Abbé Terrai, which had not even the excuse of necessity, but was occasioned only by shameful expences, had deprived him of part of his fortune, he was seen to give assistance to those who had no

property left ; and to build houses which he sold to others at a low price to be paid him in annuities ; while he solicited the good offices of the government in their behalf, and employed his influence with sovereigns, ministers, and the leading men of all nations to procure a sale for the clocks and watches of this infant manufactory, which soon became famous throughout Europe.

In the mean time, the government was employed in opening an asylum for the Genevese at Versoy, on the borders of the lake. There it was designed to have established a city, in
which

which industry and commerce would have been free, and in which a protestant temple would have risen by the side of a catholic church. Voltaire had caused this plan to be adopted, but the minister did not possess sufficient credit to obtain a law for the protection of religious liberty; a secret toleration, limited to the time of his own administration, was all that he could offer, and with that Verfoy could not exist.

The year 1771 was one of the most embarrassing periods of Voltaire's life. The chancellor Maupeou and the duke d'Aiguillon saw themselves obliged to

attack the parliaments, to whom they both were objects of hatred, that they might not become their victims. The one could not obtain a part in the administration, nor the other preserve himself in the office which he held there, without procuring the disgrace of the Duke de Choiseul. Acting in concert with Madame du Barry, whom that minister had been imprudent enough to make his irreconcilable enemy, they persuaded the king that his contemned authority could never be restored to its vigour, that the state, incessantly agitated since the peace by parliamentary contentions, could not regain its tranquillity, if he did not
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by an act of vigour place limits to the pretensions of the judicial bodies, which they would not venture to infringe, and if a term was not fixed beyond which they would not dare longer to oppose resistance to the royal will.

The Duke de Choiseul could not adopt this project without offending the public opinion, which had a long time been inimicable to him, but which was then his sole support ; while his forced submission to the will of the people had removed him still further from the confidence of the monarch, whose affections were alienated from him. It was probable, then, that his connections with the parliaments would
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complete his disgrace, and that it would be easy to persuade the monarch either that his remaining in power would be the greatest obstacle to the success of the new measures of the government, or that he would endeavour to involve the nation in war, to preserve his situation in despite of the king's pleasure.

The attack made on the parliaments was directed with equal address. Whatever could claim the nation was carefully avoided. The king appeared only to vindicate the plenitude of the legislative power, a power which would be transferred not to the nation but to the parliaments, by admitting the doctrine

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trine that the parliaments had the right of registering edicts according to their pleasure. It was easily perceived that this power, united to the most extensive judicial authority, which was divided among the twelve perpetual tribunals, would tend to establish a tyrannic aristocracy in France, more dangerous, than monarchy, to the security, the liberty, and the property of the citizens. The enemies of those tribunals might therefore rely on the suffrages of enlightened minds, and on that of men of letters, whom the parliament of Paris had wounded by its insolence and persecution, by its attachment to prejudices, and by its pertinacity in
rejecting

rejecting every improvement calculated for the happiness of men.

But it is less difficult to form a political intrigue with address, than to execute with wisdom a plan of reform. The more alarming to liberty are the principles which the governing power would establish, the more necessary is it to display gentleness and indulgence to individuals. Yet, at that time, rigour was, in the minutest circumstances, carried to a puerile refinement. A monarch appears cruel, who, in the punishments which he inflicts, does not scrupulously respect, consistently with that punishment, whatever can
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be injurious to the health, the convenience, or even the natural feelings of those whom he punishes, or those who are connected with them ; but, on this occasion, all these considerations were disregarded. They refused permission to a son to embrace his dying father ; they confined a man in an unhealthy place, where his family could not approach him without being exposed to partake of his dangers, and a sick person could scarcely obtain leave to seek in the capital the assistance which that alone could give him. When an absolute government betrays fear, it proclaims either distrust of its strength, the indecision of the monarch, or the instability

instability of the administration, and this gives encouragement to resistance : but this fear was displayed in making the recal of some exiles depend on a consent useless even in the opinion of those who demanded that consent.

A salutary operation does not change its nature though it be executed with wanton severity ; but then the feeling and enlightened man who approves, does not defend it, should he think his duty calls on him to give the measure his support, without regret ; his disgusted mind no longer acts with either zeal or affection for a cause which is dishonoured by its leaders.

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Those whose minds are uninformed pass from a hatred of the minister to aversion to measures which he maintains by oppression; and the public voice condemns that which, left to itself, it had perhaps approved.

The great number of magistrates who were by this revolution deprived of their offices, the merit and virtues of some of them, the crowd of subordinate ministers of justice who were connected with their fate by honour and by interest, that natural propensity which leads men to join the cause of those who suffer, the hatred of power not less natural, all necessa-

rily, co-operated to render the measures of the minister odious, and to place obstacles in his way when, compelled to replace the tribunals which he wished to destroy, force became useless and confidence necessary.

However, the barbarity of the criminal law, the disgusting defects of the civil jurisprudence, presented to the authors of the revolution sure means to regain the public opinion, and to give those who should consent to replace the former parliaments an excuse which honour and patriotism might have been proud to avow. Ministers disdained these means. The parliament had rendered

dered itself obnoxious to all enlightened men by the obstacles which it opposed to the liberty of the press, and by its fanaticism, of which the recent execution of the Chevalier de la Barre had given an example to all Europe. Yet, irritated by libels published against himself, alarmed by works in which his principles had been attacked, and, in short, desirous of gaining a support in the clergy, the chancellor thought proper to lay new restrictions on the press. The stain was not removed from the memory of the Chevalier de la Barre, nor could Voltaire obtain a revision of the sentence which would have covered those with disgrace whom

it was so particularly the interest of the chancellor to deprive of the public favour. The criminal code existed in all its horror, although eight days would have sufficed to have formed a law which would have suppressed the punishment of death so wantonly inflicted, would have abolished every species of torture, and would have prohibited excess in corporal punishment; which would have granted the accused the assistance of a counsel, would have permitted him to make a certain number of challenges without alledging his motives, would have given him the right to present evidence and to display facts in his favour, and would have made a

very considerable majority of the judges necessary to his condemnation ; which, in fine, would have insured him the power of knowing and examining all the proceedings. The nation, all Europe would have applauded the reform ; the displaced magistrates would alone have been the enemies of these salutary innovations ; and their fall the epoch, in which the sovereign had recovered the liberty of yielding to his just and humane purposes.

In truth the sale of judicial offices was suppressed ; yet, the judges being still named by the court, nothing was seen in this change but the facility of

placing on the seat of justice men without fortune and more easy to be seduced.

The bounds of the most extensive jurisdictions were circumscribed, but the new courts were not erected into parliaments; they were not permitted to register arrears, and this difference between those and the former tribunals was the sure presage of their destruction. In fine, the fees of the judges were abolished and replaced by stated salaries; and this regulation, among all that were adopted, was the only one which reason could entirely approve.

The

The authors of this revolution at length beheld its accomplishment, notwithstanding an almost universal discontent. The Duke de Choiseul, accused of secretly fomenting the resistance, unsteady as it was, of the parliament of Paris, and of having retarded the conclusion of peace between England and Spain, was exiled to his estates. The parliament, whose gratitude obliged them to assume firmness, was soon dispersed. The Duke d'Aiguillon became minister, and the parliament was succeeded by a new tribunal. In some of the provinces the parliaments experienced the fate of that of Paris, while others consented

to remain and sacrifice several of their members. All was silent before authority; and nothing was wanting to the success of the ministers but the approbation of the public whom they scorned, and who, some years after, wrought their disgrace.

Voltaire despised the parliament of Paris, and loved the Duke de Choiseul; he beheld in one an ancient persecutor who had not been disarmed but further incensed by his fame, in the other a friend and a protector. He was constant in his gratitude and immoveable in his principles. All his letters expressed his regard for the Duke de Choiseul

Choiseul with freedom and energy, and he was not ignorant that his letters, in consequence of the infamous custom of violating public faith, were read by the enemies of the exiled minister. A pleasant tale, entitled *Barmécide**, which he wrote, is the only durable monument of the concern which this disgrace had excited. The injustice with which the friends and partizans of the Duke de Choiseul accused Voltaire of ingratitude was, therefore, one of the severest afflictions which he had ever endured; and it was the more poignant as the Duke himself partook of the injustice.

* The letter of *Benaldaki* to *Caramustî*. VOLUME OF LETTERS.

Ineffectually did Voltaire endeavour to undeceive him, ineffectually did he appeal to the proofs he had given of his attachment and his sorrow :

Je l'ai dit à la terre, au ciel, à Gusman même :*

he wrote in his grief, but he was not understood.

The great and people in office have interests, but rarely opinions. To oppose those who agree with their present designs is, in their eyes, to declare against themselves. That attachment of truth which is one of the strongest pas-

* To earth, to heaven, to Gusman's self the tale I told,

sions of exalted and independent minds, appears romantic to them. They suppose that a philosopher has, like themselves, no opinions but those of the moment, and consequently that he must change his professions according to the temporary interests of their friends or patrons. They consider him as a man made to defend the cause which they have embraced and not to support his own principles; to serve under them and not to examine the justice of the war. Thus the Duke de Choiseul appeared to imagine that Voltaire, in deference to him, ought either to have betrayed or concealed his opinions on questions of public right. An important anecdote

dote, which proves how easily the pride of power and birth destroys the recollection of the natural independence of the human soul, and which displays the inequality of men's minds, which is much more real than that of their rank or situation.

Voltaire beheld, with pleasure, the practice of selling judicial offices abolished, the fees of the judges suppressed, and the immense jurisdiction of the parliament of Paris contracted within narrower limits : abuses which he had combated, for more than forty years, with the weapons of reason and ridicule. He preferred a single master to many;

many ; a sovereign whose prejudices are alone to be feared to a troop of despots whose prejudices are greater but whose partial interests and little passions are more fatal to mankind, and who, more formidable to the unprotected, are especially so to men whose knowledge alarms them and whose glory irritates them. He was wont to say : “ I have a stubborn back ; I can make a single bow well enough, but a hundred bows in succession are too fatiguing.”

He therefore applauded the regulations which had been adopted, and, among men of congenial minds, he expressed

pressed his approbation. Doubtless, he perceived with what contracted views this happy opportunity of reforming the legislation, of unshackling the mind and restoring to man the rights of men, of at once proscribing intolerance and barbarity, and, in fine, of dating from this moment, the epoch of a revolution propitious to the nation, glorious to the prince and his ministers, had been neglected and lost. But Voltaire had also too much penetration not to feel that though the laws were the same the magistrates were changed; that if even these should inherit the spirit of their predecessors neither their credit nor their insolence could descend to them,

that the innovation, by depriving them of the blind respect which the vulgar entertain for all that bears the rust of antiquity, had deprived them of much of their power, that the public voice could alone restore their influence, and to obtain its suffrage there remained no other means than that of listening to reason and of uniting themselves to the enemies of prejudice, and the friends of the human race.

The approbation which Voltaire gave to the measures of the Chancellor Maupeou, was at least serviceable to the oppressed. Though he could not procure justice to be done to the memory of

of

of the unfortunate la Barre, though he could not restore the young d' Etallonde to his country, though the minister's pusillanimous respect for the clergy concealed from him the true interest of his glory, still Voltaire had the happiness to save the wife of Montbailli. This unhappy man, accused of parricide, had perished on the wheel; his wife was also condemned to death; but she was supposed to be pregnant, and was fortunate enough to obtain a respite.

The tribunals had just rejected a provident law which, placing an interval between judgment and execution in
which

which the truth might be discovered and innocence displayed, would have prevented almost all their unjust decisions; and they had refused it with an intemperance which sufficed to prove its necessity.* Women alone, by declaring themselves pregnant, could escape the danger of these precipitate executions. In the space of less than twenty years the lives of three innocent persons, who had attracted the public curiosity by some particular cir-

* It is but justice to observe that all the magistrates did not entertain this high idea of their rights, and this love of power. One of them has merited the esteem and veneration of every citizen, by speaking, in the parliament of Paris, these remarkable words: *The citizens alone have rights; the magistrates, as magistrates, have only duties.*

cumstances,

cumstances, had been saved by this privilege ; another proof of the utility of that law which was opposed only by a barbarous pride, and which ought to exist till experience shall have proved that the new legislation (which doubtless will soon replace the old code) no longer exposes innocence to any danger.

The trial of the wife of Montbailli was revised ; the council of Artois, by which she had been condemned, declared her innocent ; and, more noble or less presumptuous than the parliament of Thoulouse, they lamented the irreparable misfortune of having caused

an innocent person to perish, and they imposed on themselves the duty of providing for the remaining days of the unfortunate woman whose happiness they had destroyed.

Had Voltaire expressed his zeal against such acts of injustice only as were connected with public events or the cause of toleration, he might have been accused of vanity ; but this zeal was equally ardent in that obscure cause, to which his name alone has given celebrity.

We have since seen, in like manner, a magistrate*, too soon snatched away

* M. Dupati.

from his friends and the unfortunate, interest Europe in the cause of three peasants of Champagne ; and obtain, by his eloquence and perseverance, a splendid and lasting fame, the reward of zeal which humanity and the love of justice alone had inspired. Men incapable of these actions never fail to attribute them to a desire of renown ; they know not what anguish the spectacle of an unjust act inflicts on a noble and feeling mind, to what degree it torments memory and thought, and how greatly it causes the imperious desire of preventing or repairing a crime to be felt ; they are ignorant of that emotion, that involuntary horror, which

is

is excited in all the senses by the sight, even by the mere idea, of an oppressor escaping with triumph or impunity; and we must pity those who could think that the author of *Alzire* and *Brutus* needed the glory attendant on a good action, to incite him to defend innocence and to rise up against tyranny.

A new occasion of avenging insulted humanity was presented to Voltaire. Vassalage solemnly abolished in France by Louis *Hutin* (*the boisterous*), again existed under Louis XV. in many provinces. In vain had a project of abolishing it been more than once formed. Avarice and pride had silenced justice, by a resist-

ance which had fatigued the indolence of government ; and the superior tribunals, composed of nobles, had favoured the pretensions of the proprietors of these seignories.

This enormity tyrannised over Franche Comté, and particularly over the territory of St. Claude, the secular monks of which, in 1742, owed the greatest part of their lands, held in Mort-Main, to nothing better than false titles ; and exercised their rights with a rigour which reduced to misery an uninformed but good and industrious people. At the death of each possessor, if his children had not constantly inhabited the paternal

paternal house, the fruit of his labours appertained to the monks ; the widow and her offspring, without furniture, without cloaths, and without dwelling, passed from the competence procured by labour, to all the horrors of want. Should a stranger die after having dwelt a year on this species of land, stricken with the feudal anathema, his property also became that of the monks ; nor did a son succeed to the inheritance of his father, if it could be proved that he had passed the night of his nuptials out of the paternal house.

These people suffered without daring to complain, and beheld, with mute

B b 3 grief,

grief, the fruits of their economy, which should have furnished useful capitals to industry and the culture of the land, become the prey of the monks. Happily, the construction of a great road opened a communication between them and the neighbouring cantons. They learnt that, at the foot of mount Jura, there existed a man whose intrepid voice had more than once caused the very palaces of kings to resound with the complaints of the oppressed, and at whose name sacerdotal tyranny turned pale. To him they related their griefs, and in him they found a protector,

These

These usurpations, this inexorable cruelty of hypocritical priests, who dared to call themselves the disciples of an humble master yet wished to hold men in slavery, were proclaimed, not only to France but to all Europe. Yet, after soliciting relief for many years, nothing could be obtained from the timid successor of M. de Maupeou, except an arret of council, which forbade this base violation of the rights of mankind. His fear of disobliging the parliament of Besançon would not permit him to withdraw, from its jurisdiction, a cause which could not be regarded as an ordinary suit without shamefully acknowledging the legiti-

macy of the feudal slavery. The vassals of St. Claude were sent back to a tribunal, whose members, the lords of the lands subject to this tyranny, took a barbarous pleasure in riveting the chains of those poor people; who still continue enslaved.

All they have obtained was the liberty, granted them in 1778, of abandoning their home and their country to escape from the dominion of the monks; but another article of that same law more than balanced this benefaction, so ineffectual to unfortunate men, whom poverty rather than the law has confined to the spot of their birth. In
this

this very edict the fovereign has, for the first time, given the name and sacred character of property to the detestable rights which, even in the midst of the ignorance and barbarity of the thirteenth century, were considered as usurpations which neither time nor titles can render legitimate ; and an hypocritical minister has made the liberty of the peasant depend, not on the justice of laws, but on the will of his tyrants.

Who that reads these details would suppose that he reads the life of a great poet, of a prolific and indefatigable writer ? We forget his literary fame,

as

as he himself lost sight of it. He seemed no longer to pursue any object of fame, but that of avenging the human race, and of snatching victims from oppression.

His genius, however, incapable of inactivity, cultivated every species of literature on which it had ever exercised its powers, and even dared to essay new subjects. He published some tragedies, which we may doubtless, reproach with feebleness, and which could no longer force the applauses of an audience whom he himself had rendered difficult, but in which the man of letters may gratify his taste by beautiful verses, and his judgment

judgment by profound, enlightened ideas, while he who is ambitious to write for the theatre may in them study the secrets of his art ; he wrote tales, in which that species of composition, till then employed only to reflect pleasing and voluptuous images, which amuse the imagination or awaken gaiety, assumed a more philosophic character, and became, like the apologue, a school of morality and reason ; he wrote epistles, which, if compared with his first works, will be found less correct, less uniformly animated, and less poetical ; but, in return, possessed of more simplicity and variety, a more general and free spirit of philosophy, and a greater

greater number of those acute and deep remarks which are the product of experience. To these he added satires, in which prejudice and its patrons are ridiculed under a thousand varying forms.

About the same time, in his Philosophy of History, he gave lessons to historians, while he provoked the enmity of pedants, by unveiling their dullness, credulity, and invidious admiration of antiquity ; he finished his Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, his Age of Louis XIV. to which he added the Age of Louis XV. an incomplete but faithful history, the only

one by which we can form an adequate idea of the events of that reign, and in which we find all the truth that can be expected in a cotemporary history, which is neither a libel nor a eulogium.

New romances, works sometimes serious and sometimes humorous, and dictated by circumstances, did not add to his reputation, but they continued to render it ever present with the public, to sustain the interests of his partisans, and to humiliate that herd of secret enemies, who assumed the mask of austerity, that they might withhold
that

that admiration which the example of Europe commanded them to give.

In fine, he undertook to assemble, in the form of a dictionary, all the ideas which presented themselves to his mind on the various objects of his reflections; that is to say, on almost all that is comprised in the circle of human knowledge. In this collection, modestly entitled, *Questions to the Lovers of Science respecting the Encyclopedia*, he treats successively of theology, grammar, natural philosophy, and literature. At one time, he discusses the subjects of antiquity; at others, questions of policy,

policy, legislation, and public economy. His style ever animated and seductive, clothed these various objects with a charm hitherto known to himself only; and which chiefly springs from the licence with which, yielding to his successive emotions, adapting his style less to his subject than to the momentary disposition of his mind, sometimes he spreads ridicule on objects which seem capable of inspiring only horror, and, almost instantaneously hurried away by the energy and sensibility of his soul, he vehemently and eloquently exclaims against abuses which he had just before treated with mockery. His anger is
excited

excited by false taste; he quickly perceives that his indignation ought to be reserved for interests which are more important; and he finishes by laughing in his usual way. Sometimes, he abruptly leaves a moral or political discussion for a literary criticism; and, in the midst of a lesson on taste, he pronounces abstract maxims of the profoundest philosophy, or makes a sudden and terrible attack on fanaticism and tyranny.

The constant interest which Voltaire took in the success of Russia against the Turks deserves to be noticed.

Highly distinguished by the favours of the empress, doubtless gratitude animated his zeal; but we should be deceived did we imagine his zeal had no other cause. Superior to those politics of the counting-house, which take the interest of merchants known to financiers, for the interests of commerce, and the interests of commerce for that of the human race, not less superior to those vain ideas of the balance of Europe so valuable to political compilers, he beheld, in the destruction of the Ottoman empire, millions of men at least assured of shunning under the despotism of a sovereign the intolerable despotism of a whole people; he hoped

to see the imperious manners of the East which condemn women to a disgraceful slavery banished into the unhappy climates that gave them birth. Immense countries situated under a propitious Heaven, destined by nature to be clothed with all the productions most useful to mankind, would have been restored to the industry of their inhabitants; these countries, the first in which man discovered genius, would have beheld, again springing up in their bosom, the arts of which they gave the most perfect models, and the sciences, whose foundations were laid by them.

The

The usual speculations of some merchants would without doubt have been deranged, and their profits diminished; but the real welfare of all people would have been augmented, because it is not possible to extend the space on the globe in which agriculture flourishes, commerce is secure, and industry active, without increasing for the use of all men the mass of enjoyments and resources. Can it be desirable that a philosopher should prefer the riches of some nations to the liberty of an entire people, and the commerce of a few cities to the progress of agriculture and of the arts in a great empire? Far from us be those despicable reasoners who would

still hold Greece in Turkish chains, in order that they may seize on the persons of men, sell them as herds of cattle, compel them, by the dread of punishment, to furnish food for their insatiable avarice ; and who gravely calculate the pretended wealth which is produced, by these outrages on nature.

That men should every where be free, and that each country should enjoy the advantages given it by nature, would be the common interests of all people, as well of those who have reassumed their rights as of those in which certain individuals, and not the community

community, have been benefitted by the distress of others. Opposed to objects so grand and to that eternal good which would arise out of a revolution so vast, of what importance would the ruin of a few avaricious men be ; and of men too, whose wealth originated in the tears and the blood of their fellow citizens !

Thus thought M. Turgot ; and thus Voltaire could not but think.

Men have declaimed against the injustice of a war against the Turks : can we be unjust toward a hoard of robbers, who hold a people in slavery,

and whose avidious ferocity overwhelms these people with outrages ? Let them return to those deserts which the imbecility of Europe permitted them to quit, since, in their brutal pride, they have continued to produce a race of tyrants ! At length, let the country of those to whom we owe our knowledge, our arts, and even our virtues, cease to be dishonoured by the presence of a people who unite the despicable vices of effeminacy to the ferocity of savages !

Fears are entertained for the balance of Europe, as though such conquests would not diminish, instead of increasing the power of the conquerors ; as
 though

though Asia must not long offer an easy prey to the ambitious, which would give them a distaste for the hazardous conquests which might be obtained in Europe. It is not the policy of princes, it is the wisdom of a civilised people, which must for ever preserve the peace of Europe ; and the more civilization shall extend over the earth, the more shall we behold war and conquests, as well as slavery and misery, disappear.

Louis the XVth died. This prince, who had long in his conduct contemned the precepts of the moral christian, was not, however, superior to superstitious terrors. The menaces of religion

assumed new vigour to terrify him on the appearance of the least danger ; but he imagined that a promise of continence so easily made on a death-bed, and certain words from the mouth of a priest, could expiate the errors of a reign of sixty years. Even more timid than superstitious, accustomed by the Cardinal de Fleury to consider liberty of thought as a cause of disorder in states, or at least of embarrassment to governments, it was nevertheless in despite of himself that under his reign human reason made a rapid progress in France. He who laboured for its advancement with most success and splendour was become the object of his hatred,

hatred. Yet he respected in Voltaire the glory of France; and could not view, without pride, the admiration of Europe place one of his subjects in the first rank of illustrious characters.

His death made no change in Voltaire's situation. To the prejudices of Cardinal de Fleury, M. Maurepas joined a still more implacable hatred of all those who rose superior to the ordinary class of men.

Voltaire had been profuse of his exaggerated praise of Louis XV. till the time of his visit to the court of Prussia,
but

but without being able to disarm the king's unjust dislike of him. He had observed an almost absolute silence from the period in which the errors and misfortunes of this reign would have rendered eulogy abject. But after the death of that monarch he dared to be just to his memory, at the instant in which nearly the whole nation seemed happy in wounding his name. It has been remarked that the philosophers, whom Louis XV. did not patronize, were at that time the only persons who observed some impartiality; while the priests, loaden with his benefactions, insulted his weakness.

The

The new reign soon presented to Voltaire hopes which he had not dared to form. M. Turgot was called to the administration. Voltaire knew him to be a man of profound genius, who, in every species of science, had created sure and determinate principles on which he had founded all his opinions, and according to which he directed the whole of his conduct ; a glory that no other statesman has been worthy of partaking with him. He knew that, to a soul zealous for the truth and for the happiness of man, M. Turgot united fortitude that was above all fear, and grandeur of character superior to all dissimulation ; that in his eyes the most
important

important situation was but the means of executing his salutary views; and appeared to him no more than a vile slavery when that hope should be lost. In fine, Voltaire knew that, free from all prejudices and detesting, in those prejudices, the most dangerous enemies of the human race, M. Turgot regarded the liberty of thought and of the press as the right of each citizen, and the right of entire nations, whose happiness the progress of reason alone can establish on an immovable basis.

In the nomination of M. Turgot, Voltaire saw the dawn of the reign of reason; so long disavowed and
much

much longer persecuted ; he dared to look for the rapid fall of prejudices, and for the destruction of that cowardly and tyrannic policy which, to flatter the pride or indolence of men in place, had condemned the people to humiliation and misery.

Yet his attempts in favour of the vassals of Mount Jura were ineffectual ; and in vain he endeavoured to obtain for d'Etallonde, and for the memory of the Chevalier de la Barre, that distinguished justice which humanity and the national honour equally required. These objects were foreign to the department of the finances ; and
that

that superiority of information, of character, and of virtue, which M. Turgot could not conceal, had created him, in the other ministers and in the intriguing subalterns of office, too many enemies ; who, finding neither ambition nor personal projects to oppose in him, bent themselves against all that they believed consonant with his just and beneficent designs.

Beside, liberty could not be restored to the vassals of mount Jura without offending the parliament of Besançon ; the revision of the process of Abbeville had humiliated that of Paris; and an unwise policy had re-established the

2 parliaments

parliaments without taking advantage of their temporary overthrow, and the little credit of those who had replaced them, to introduce into the laws and the tribunals an entire reform, the necessity of which was felt by all enlightened men. But an administration which was feeble, and the enemy of reformation, did not dare or did not wish to seize this occasion, in which the public good had found still less obstacles than in the instance which was so shamefully neglected by the Chancellor Maupeou.

Thus also, through complaisance to the prejudices of the parliaments, ministers

sters suffered the advantages for the reform of education to be lost, which was offered to them by the destruction of the Jesuits. They did not even, in 1774, take any precaution to prevent the renewal of the contentions which, in 1770, had led to the ruin of the magistracy. They had pursued but a single object, the advantage of securing a personal gratitude, which gave to the authors of the change a means of employing the credit of the corps, whose re-establishment was their work, with success against the rivals of their power.

Hence the only advantage which Voltaire could obtain, from the administration

nistration of M. Turgot, was to withdraw the little country of Gex from the tyranny of the *farms*. Separated from France by mountains, having an easy communication with Geneva and Switzerland, this unfortunate country could not be subjected to the revenue laws without becoming the theatre of perpetual war between the servants of the revenue and the inhabitants, nor without paying expences for the collection still more burdensome than the imposts themselves. The little importance of this regulation should have rendered it easy; yet, it was long solicited, in vain, by M. de Voltaire.

Part of the provinces of France have, through various causes, escaped the yoke of the *Farm-general*, or have only borne half of its weight ; but the farmers-general have incessantly increased their limits, and enveloped in their chains detached cantons which had long been protected by feudal privileges. They believed that their God *Terminus*, like that of the Romans, ought never to recede ; and that the first step he should retreat would be the presage of destruction to the empire. Their opposition, however, could not induce M. Turgot to abandon a just and beneficent operation, which, without
injury

injury to the revenue, would lessen the burden of the inhabitants, diminish the number of crimes and oppressions, and restore prosperity and peace to a district pillaged by despotism.

The country of Gex, then, was delivered from the yoke, on condition of raising thirty thousand livres; and Voltaire had the pleasure of writing to his friends, in a parody of a verse of Mithridates :

Et mes derniers regards ont vu fuir les commis.*

Voltaire's respect for M. Turgot would have been augmented by the

* And, at length, I've seen the excisemen fly.

edicts of 1776 had he not already known that minister's genius, and comprehended his views. This great statesman had perceived that, placed at the head of the finances at a moment in which he was embarrassed by the mass of the public debt, and by obstacles which the courtiers and the first minister opposed to every great reform in administration and to all important economy, he could not diminish the imposts; but he wished, at least, to give some consolation to the people, and some indemnity to the proprietors of lands, by restoring to them rights of which they had been deprived by oppressive regulations.

The

The remains of feudal slavery which spread desolation through the country, which compelled the poor to labour without hire, and deprived agriculture of the husbandmen's cattle, were changed into an impost, paid only by the proprietors of land. Through all the cities, ridiculous corporations obliged a part of the inhabitants to purchase the right of labouring; those who subsisted by commerce or their own industry were compelled to live under the vassalage of a certain number of privileged people, or to pay a tribute to these bodies; this absurd institution disappeared, and the right of

D d 3 freely

freely employing their time and strength was restored to the citizens.

The proprietors of grain and of wine, the first harraffed by popular prejudices, the other by despotic privileges, which had been extorted by particular cities, were relieved from those oppressions ; and these wise laws could not fail to accelerate the progress of agriculture, and multiply the national wealth, by insuring the subsistence of the people.

But these beneficent edicts were the signal of that minister's fall who had
the

the boldness to conceive them. They excited the opposition of the parliaments who were interested in supporting the *Jurandes** the fertile source of lucrative law suits, who were not less attached to the old regulations which furnished them with the means of acting on the minds of the people, who were irritated to see the burden of making roads laid on the opulent owners of land, and were without any hope that an unworthy condescension would continue to lighten the weight of their individual taxes, but who were more particularly alarmed at the influence

* The wardenship of the different companies of tradesmen.

which seemed to be acquired by a minister, whose benevolent spirit menaced the overthrow of their power.

The intrigues of the enemies of M. Turgot were strengthened by this league of the parliaments; and it was then perceived how servicable to their secret and pernicious designs was the manner in which the tribunals had been re-established; it was then seen how dangerous it is to a minister to design the welfare of the people; and, perhaps, were we to mount up to the cause of events, we should find that the fall even of vicious ministers has originated in the good which they wished

wished to do, and not in the evil which they have produced.

In the calamities of France Voltaire beheld the destruction of hopes which he had entertained for the advancement of the human mind. He had imagined that intolerance, superstition, and the monstrous prejudices which infected every branch of legislation, every department of power, and all conditions of society, would have fled before a minister who was the friend of justice, of liberty, and reason. Such as have accused Voltaire of base adulation, such as have bitterly reproached him with the use which he made of praise,

praise, perhaps too frequently, to influence the minds of powerful men and to compel them to be just and humane, may compare those praises to his eulogy of M. Turgot, and to his *Epistle to a Man* which he addressed to that minister at the moment of his disgrace. They will then distinguish the admiration which is the result of feeling, from a compliment; and the esteem which arises in the soul, from the play of imagination; and they will perceive that Voltaire committed no other crime than that of treating courtiers as women: nearly the same protestations are bestowed on the whole sex, and it is the tone alone that distinguishes

stinguishes the praise which is felt from that which is given to politeness.

Voltaire, offering incense to kings and ministers to engage them on the side of truth, and Voltaire, celebrating genius and virtue, speaks not the same language. Did he wish only to flatter, he was prodigal of the charms of his brilliant imagination, he multiplied these ingenious ideas which were ever ready at his call ; but did he wish to render an homage acknowledged by his heart, it was his soul which escaped him, it was his reason which spoke. During his visit to Paris his admiration of M. Turgot was infused

fused through all his discourse. M. Turgot was the man whom he opposed to all who complained of the depravity of our age ; and to him his mind gave its entire approbation. I have seen him take his hands, bathe them with his tears, kiss them, in despite of M. Turgot's resistance, and cry with a voice interrupted by sobs : " Let me kiss the hand which would seal the happiness of the people."

Voltaire had long desired to revisit his country, and to enjoy his reputation in the midst of the same people who had been the witness of his first success and too often the accomplice of his enemies.

enemies. M. de Villette had lately, at Ferney, espoused Mademoiselle de Varicour, a lady descended from a noble family in the country of Gex, whom her relations had confided to the care of Madame Denis. Voltaire accompanied them to Paris, partly led by the desire of seeing the representation of the tragedy of Irene, which he had shortly before finished. It had been kept a profound secret ; and malice had not time to prepare her poison, nor would the public enthusiasm have permitted its operation. A croud of men and women of every rank and condition, from whom his verses had drawn the tears of humanity, who had

so frequently admired his genius at the theatre and in reading his works, who were indebted to him for their improvement, whose prejudices he had destroyed, and to whom he had imparted a spark of that zeal against fanaticism by whose flame he was devoured, were eager to behold him. Jealousy was silent before a glory which it was impossible to extinguish, before the benefit which he had conferred on mankind. Ministers, and proud prelates, were obliged to respect the idol of the nation. This enthusiasm was even spread through the common ranks of the people; they crowded round his windows, and passed whole hours there with the hope

hope of seeing him for one moment. His carriage, which could scarcely proceed along the streets, was furrounded by a numerous multitude, who blessed him and celebrated his works.

The French academy, which had not adopted him till the age of fifty-two, lavished honours on him, and received him rather as soveraign of the empire of letters than as an equal. The children of those haughty courtiers, whose pride had been wounded to see him live in their society without meanness, and who had wished to humiliate in his person the superiority of genius and talents, contended for the honour
of

of being presented to him, and of an opportunity to boast that they had seen Voltaire.

But it was at the theatre, where he had so long reigned, that he had the greatest honours to expect. He went to the third representation of *Irene*; which was, indeed, but a feeble tragedy; which, however, possessed many beauties, and in which the wrinkles of age could not conceal the sacred impression of genius. He alone drew the attention of a people, eager to distinguish his features, to observe his gestures, to pursue the direction of his eyes. His bust was crowned on the
stage

stage in the midst of applause, cries of joy, and tears of enthusiasm. To quit the theatre he must pass through the multitude that crouded round him; feeble, scarce able to support himself, the guards, which were designed to protect him from the eagerness of zeal, became useless; at his approach, each retired with a respectful attention, or disputed the honour of supporting him a moment on the stairs; each step offered him new aid, nor was any one permitted to arrogate too long the right of giving him assistance.

The spectators followed him to his apartment, and the air was filled with

the cries of *Long live Voltaire! Long live the Henriade! Long live Mahomet!* numbers fell at his feet, and numbers kissed his garment. Never has man been received with more interesting marks of admiration and of public affection, nor ever has genius been honoured by a more flattering homage; and this homage was addressed, not to his power, but to the happiness which he had conferred on man. An illustrious poet would have been received only with plaudits: tears flowed before the philosopher, who had destroyed the fetters of reason, and avenged the cause of humanity.

The

The sublime and impassioned soul of Voltaire was moved with these tributes of respect and zeal: "They wish me to die with pleasure," he said; but it was the voice of sensibility, and not the artifice of self-love. In the midst of the honours paid him by the French academy, he was particularly struck by the possibility of introducing into that place a more daring philosophy: "They treat me with more attention than I merit," he said to me, one day; "do you know that I do not despair of causing the eulogium of Coligny to be spoken there?"

During the run of Irene, he was employed in revising his essay on the

Manners and the spirit of Nations ; and to give, in that work, some new wounds to fanaticism. He had with secret pleasure observed, at the theatre, that the lines which were received with the greatest acclamations were those in which he attacked superstition and the names she had long rendered sacred ; and it was to this object he ascribed all the glory he had acquired. He beheld, in that general admiration, the empire which he had exercised over the mind, and the destruction of prejudices which he had accomplished.

At this same time, Paris boasted, also, the presence of the celebrated

Franklin, who, in another hemisphere, had been the apostle of philosophy and toleration. Like Voltaire, he had often employed the weapon of humour which corrects the absurdities of men, and had displayed their perverseness as a folly more fatal, but also worthy of pity. He had joined to the science of metaphysics the genius of practical philosophy; as Voltaire, that of poetry. Franklin had delivered the vast countries of America from the yoke of Europe; and Voltaire had freed Europe from the yoke of the ancient theocracy of Asia. Franklin was eager to see a man whose reputation had long been spread over both worlds; Voltaire, al-

though he had lost the habit of speaking English, endeavoured to support the conversation in that language ; and, afterwards reassuming the French, he said : *Je n'ai pu résister au d'sir de parler un moment la langue de M. Franklin**.

The American philosopher presented his grandson to Voltaire, with a request that he would give him his benediction. “ God and liberty!” said Voltaire : “ it is the only benediction which can be given to the grandson of Franklin.” They went together to a public assembly of the academy of sciences, and the

* I could not resist the desire of speaking the language of Mr. Franklin for a moment.

public at the same time beheld with emotion these two men, born in different quarters of the globe, respectable by their years, their glory, the employment of their life, and both enjoying the influence which they had exercised over the age in which they lived. They embraced each other in the midst of public acclamations, and it was said to be Solon who embraced Sophocles. But the French Sophocles had trampled on error and advanced the reign of reason; and the Solon of Philadelphia, having placed the constitution of his country on the immoveable foundation of the rights of men, had no fear of seeing his uncertain laws, even during his own

life, open the way to tyranny and prepare fetters for his country.

Age had not enfeebled the activity of Voltaire, and the transports with which he was received by his fellow citizens seemed to renew his vigour. He formed the design of refuting whatever the Duke de St. Simon in his memoirs, then unpublished, had written under the influence of hatred and prejudice, ~~lest~~ these memoirs, which might derive ~~some~~ authority from the known probity of the author and from his rank and title of cotemporary, should appear ~~at the~~ time in which men would be too ~~far~~ removed from the events of which
he

he speaks, to detect error and defend the truth.

He had also induced the French academy to adopt the design of forming its dictionary on a new plan. They were to have deduced the history of each word from the period in which it had appeared in the language, to give the various meanings which it assumed in different ages, and the various acceptations it had received, and to employ, in order to display these varied shades, not capricious phrases, but examples selected from authors of the greatest authority. Then would have been seen the true literary and grammatical

matical dictionary of the language, and not only foreigners but even Frenchmen might, in that work, have acquired a knowledge of all its delicacy.

This dictionary would have presented instructive pages to men of letters, would have contributed to form the national taste, and arrested the progress of corruption. Each academician was to have explained a letter of the alphabet. Voltaire undertook the letter A; and, to excite the industry of his brethren, and to banish the difficulty of executing this plan, he was desirous to finish, within a few months, that part of the work which he had assumed.

His

His strength was wasted by such excessive application; and he had been much reduced by a spitting of blood, caused by his efforts during the representation of *Irene*. Yet, the activity of his mind subdued all, and concealed from him the real weakness of his constitution. At length, deprived of sleep by an irritation produced by too intense labour, he wished to procure some hours repose, that he might be in a condition to lead the academy irrevocably to engage in the new dictionary, against which some objections had arisen; and he resolved to take opium. His imagination possessed all its vivacity, his soul was equally restless and impetuous, his character abated

abated not of its gaiety and its vigour, when he took the opiate which he judged to be necessary. During the same evening, his friends had heard him express his detestation of prejudices with his usual eloquence; and soon after beheld him viewing them only on the ridiculous side, and deriding them with that peculiar grace and aptness which characterised his sallies of wit. But he took the opiate at several doses, and was deceived as to the quantity, probably in the species of intoxication which the first had produced. The same accident happened to him about thirty years before, and then placed his life in danger. Unhappily, this time,

his

his wasted powers were unable to contend with the poison. He had long been subject to a complaint in the bladder, and in the general decay of his organs, that soon contracted an incurable disease.

Scarcely could he, during the long interval between this fatal accident and his death, preserve his recollection for a few successive moments, or disengage himself from the lethargy in which he was plunged. To the young Count de Lalli, however, who was even then celebrated for his courage, and who has since deserved celebrity by his eloquence and patriotism, he wrote, in one
of

of these intervals, those lines, the last which were traced by his hand, in which he applauds the royal authority whose justice had lately annulled one of the atrocious acts of parliamentary despotism. At length, he expired on the 30th of May, 1778.

The arrival of Voltaire at Paris had re-kindled the fury of the fanatics, and wounded the pride of the chiefs of the hierarchy ; but it had also inspired some priests with an idea of building their reputation and their fortune on the conversion of this illustrious enemy. Certainly, they could not flatter themselves with the hope of subduing him,

but they did not despair of inducing him to dissemble. Voltaire, who wished to remain at Paris without being tormented by sacerdotal accusations, and who, from a habit acquired in his youth, thought it beneficial to the interests even of the friends of reason, that certain scenes of intolerance should not succeed his last moments, had sent in the beginning of his malady for an almoner of the incurables, and who had boasted of having restored to the bosom of the church the Abbé de L'Attaignant, known by offences of another kind.

The Abbé Gauthier confessed Voltaire, and received a profession of faith
from

from him by which he declared that he died in the catholic religion, in which he was born.

When this circumstance was known, which offended enlightened men rather more than it edified the devotees, the curate of Saint Sulpice ran to his parishioner, who received him with politeness, and gave him according to usage a handsome offering for his poor people. But, mortified that the Abbé Gauthier had anticipated him, he discovered that the almoner of the incurables had been too easily satisfied with his penitent, and that he ought to have required a more particular profession of faith, and an express disavowal
of

of all the doctrines, contrary to orthodoxy, which Voltaire had been accused of maintaining. The Abbé Gauthiers pretended that, by requiring every thing, all would have been lost. During this dispute, Voltaire recovered, Irene was played, and the conversion was forgotten. But, in the moment of the relapse, the curate returned to Voltaire, absolutely resolved not to inter him, if he could not obtain the desired recantation of his errors.

This curate was among those men who are a mixture of hypocrisy and imbecility ; he spoke with the obstinate persuasion of a maniac, and acted with

the flexibility of a jesuit ; he was humble in his manners even to baseness, arrogant in his sacerdotal pretensions, fawning with the great, and charitable to the populace who are governed by the priests that distribute alms to them, and in fine, he harraſſed the ſimple citizens, by his imperious fanaticiſm. He earneſtly wiſhed to compel Voltaire at leaſt to acknowledge the divine nature of Jeſus Chriſt ; to which he was more attached than to any other dogma. He, one day, drew Voltaire from his lethargy, by ſhouting in his ear : “ Do you believe the Divinity of Jeſus Chriſt ? ” —— “ In the name of God, ſir,” replied Voltaire, “ ſpeak to me

no more of that man ; but let me die in peace.”

The priest then declared that he was compelled to refuse him burial ; but he was not authorised in this refusal ; for, according to the laws, it ought to have been preceded by a sentence of excommunication, or a secular judgment ; and even an appeal might have been made against an excommunication, as a matter of abuse. Voltaire’s family, by complaining to the parliament, would have obtained justice ; but they feared the fanaticism of that body and the hatred of its members to Voltaire, who had so often combated its pretensions

and exerted his powers against its injustice. They did not perceive that the parliament could not, without disgrace to itself, depart from the principles on which it had acted in favour of the Janfenists; they did not know that a great number of the young magistrates waited only for an occasion of effacing, by some splendid act, the reproach of fanaticism by which they were degraded, of dignifying themselves, by ordaining a mark of respect to the memory of a man of genius whom they had been unfortunately enough to number among their enemies, and of shewing that they chose rather to atone for their injustice, than to yield to any incitements of vengeance.

geance. The friends of Voltaire did not observe how much power they had acquired by that enthusiasm which his name had excited ; an enthusiasm which had gained every class in the nation, and which no authority would venture openly to insult.

They chose rather to negotiate with government. Daring neither to offend public opinion by gratifying the vengeance of the clergy, nor to displease the priests by compelling them to obey the laws, fearing to mortify sacerdotal pride should they erect a public monument to a great man whose ashes were basely disturbed by priests, or

should they indemnify his memory for the loss of ecclesiastic honours, to which he had so little claim, by civic honours due to his genius and the services he had done the nation, ministers approved a proposal which was made of removing Voltaire's body to the church of a monastery, of which his nephew was abbé. It was accordingly conducted to Scellières, and the priests agreed not to interrupt the execution of this design. However, two ladies, of distinguished rank and very great devotees, wrote to the bishop of Troyes to engage him, in quality of diocesan bishop, to oppose the burial, But, fortunately for the honour of the bishop,

bishop, these letters arrived too late, and Voltaire was interred.

The French academy had observed a custom of saying mass at the church of the Cordeliers for each of their deceased members. The archbishop of Paris, Beaumont, so well known by his ignorance and fanaticism, prohibited the performance of the ceremony. The Cordeliers obeyed with regret; but they knew that the confessors of the archbishop would pardon his spirit of revenge, and would forbear to recommend justice to him. The academy, therefore, resolved to suspend the practice of this ceremony till the insult offered

to the most illustrious of its members should be repaired. Thus Beaumont became, in despite of himself, the instrument of destroying a ridiculous superstition.

Mean while the king of Prussia commanded a solemn mass to be said for Voltaire in the catholic church of Berlin; and the academy of Prussia was invited to attend. But that which was more glorious to Voltaire, was, that the king in the field of battle, where at the head of an hundred and fifty thousand men he defended the rights of the princes of the empire and imposed laws on the Austrian power, wrote
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the eulogium of that illustrious man, whose disciple and friend he had been, and who perhaps had never pardoned him the unworthy and disgraceful violence which he had endured at Franckfort, but towards whom the monarch was incessantly and involuntarily led by his natural taste and his admiration of genius. This eulogium nobly compensated for the mean vengeance of the priests.

Of all the enormities which, in the times of ignorance and superstition, the priests have obtained the power of committing against human nature with impunity, that which is exercised on
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the bodies of the deceased is unquestionably the least prejudicial ; and, in the eyes of enlightened men, those outrages can appear no other than a title to renown. Yet, respect for the remains of men who have been dear to us is no prejudice ; it is an affection inspired by nature herself, who has placed, in the recesses of our hearts, a veneration for every thing that can recall to our remembrance beings whom friendship or gratitude have rendered sacred to our feelings. The liberty of offering a sorrowful homage to their ashes is then a precious right to delicate minds, and the power of chusing that which their sensations shall dictate, cannot,

not, without injustice, be taken away ; still less may this consolation be forbidden at the will of an intolerant sect, who have usurped, with an audacity too long endured, the right of controuling the thoughts of men, or of inflicting punishment for them.

Beside, the empire of prejudice over the minds of the populace is not yet destroyed ; a Christian deprived of burial is still, in the eyes of inferior people, the object of horror and disdain ; and this injustice is extended even to his family. If, indeed, the hatred of priests would pursue none but men who are immortalized by their works and whose
glory

glory embraces all ages, we might pardon their despicable efforts; but their hatred may be attached to victims less illustrious; and all men have the same rights.

Government, in some degree ashamed of its feeble conduct, hoped to escape public contempt by prohibiting the naming of Voltaire in any writings, or in those places where the police was accustomed to violate the freedom of speech, under the pretence of preserving order, which it too often confounded with a respect paid to established and protected follies.

The

The public papers were forbidden to speak of his death ; and the comedians had orders to perform none of his pieces. Ministers did not discover that means like these, of preventing the anger of the nation against their weakness, would only serve more fully to provoke it ; and to demonstrate that they had neither courage to merit the approbation nor to support the blame of the public.

This simple recital of the incidents of the life of Voltaire has sufficiently developed his character and his mind ; the principal features of which were benevolence, indulgence for human foibles, and a hatred of injustice and oppression.

oppression. He may be numbered among the very few men in whom the love of humanity was a real passion; which, the noblest of all passions, was known only to modern times, and took rise from the progress of knowledge. Its very existence is sufficient to confound the blind partisans of antiquity, and those who calumniate philosophy.

But the happy qualities of Voltaire were often perverted by his natural restlessness, which the writing of tragedy had but increased. In an instant he would change from anger to affection, from indignation to a jest.' Born with violent passions, they often hurried him

him too far; and his restlessness deprived him of the advantages which usually accompany such minds; particularly of that fortitude to which fear is no obstacle, when action becomes a duty, and which is not shaken by the presence of danger foreseen. Often would Voltaire expose himself to the storm with rashness, but rarely did he brave it with constancy; and these intervals, of temerity and weakness, have frequently afflicted his friends, and afforded unworthy cause of triumph to his cowardly foes.

His affections were permanent, and his friendship for Génonville, the president

sident de Maisons, Formont, Cideville, the Marchionefs du Chatelet, d'Argental, and d'Alembert, feldom obscured by paffing clouds, ended only with his life. From his works we difcover that few men of feeling have fo long preferved the remembrance of friends loft in early youth.

He has been reproached with his numerous difputes, but in none of thefe he was the aggreffor. His enemies, thofe at leaft to whom he was irreconcilable, and whom he devoted to the world's contempt, did not confine themfelves to perfonal attacks; they were his accufers to the fanatics, and
wifhed

wished to bring down the sword of persecution on his head. It is no doubt afflicting to be obliged to place in this list men of real merit; men like the poet Rousseau, the two Pompignans *, Larcher, and even Rousseau of Geneva. But is it not more excusable to carry vengeance too far, in self-defence, and

* One of them has lately, by his noble and patriotic conduct, effaced the spots which his episcopal accusations had fixed upon his reputation. He is at present seen to adopt the same principles of freedom, with fortitude, for which in his works he bitterly reproached philosophers, and against which he invoked the vengeance of despotism. It would be wrong to accuse him of wilful tergiversation: nothing is more common than men who, to a worthy mind and integrity of understanding, join timidity; and dare not examine certain principles, nor think for themselves on certain subjects, till first supported by public opinion.

to be unjust in the indulgence of anger, the first motive of which is founded in rectitude, than to violate the rights of man, by endangering the freedom and safety of a citizen, to gratify pride, the aims of hypocrisy, or an obstinate attachment to opinions?

Voltaire has been censured, for his attacks on Maupertuis; but were not these attacks confined to the mere act of rendering a man eternally ridiculous, who, by base intrigues, had endeavoured to dishonour and ruin him; and who, to revenge some jests, had called the power of a king, irritated by his insidious arts, to his aid?

Voltaire, it is said, was envious; which has been answered by the following line, from Tancréd :

De qui dans l'univers peut-il être jaloux ?*

Yes, he was envious of Buffon. What ! could the man whose mighty arm had shaken the antique pillars of the temple of superstition, and who aspired to metamorphose the vile herd which so long had groaned under the sacerdotal rod into men, could he be envious of the lucky and splendid description of the manners of a few animals ; or the

* Does the world contain a man whom he might envy ?

more or less fortunate combination of some systems, the falsity of which is proved by facts?

He was envious of J. J. Rousseau. The boldness of Rousseau did indeed excite that of Voltaire: but was the philosopher who beheld the progress of knowledge, polishing, emancipating, and perfecting the human species, and who enjoyed the revolution as his proper work, was he jealous of the eloquent writer who wished to condemn the mind of man to eternal ignorance? Could the enemy of bigotry be jealous of him who, not finding sufficient fame
in

in the destruction of its altars, vainly endeavoured to rebuild them ?

Voltaire did not do justice to the genius of Rousseau, because his mind being equitable, and void of affectation, felt an involuntary repugnance to exaggeration ; because a tone of austerity presented to his fancy a tincture of hypocrisy, the smallest shade of which could not but disgust his frank and independent soul ; and because, being accustomed himself to treat all subjects with humour, gravity in the little details of passion, or of human life, always appeared to him to partake of the ridiculous. He was unjust, because Rousseau

had angered him, by returning injury to offers of service; had accused him of persecution, when he was employed in his defence, and had himself directed the hand of persecution toward Voltaire.

He was jealous of Montesquieu. He had cause to complain of the author of the spirit of laws, who affected to treat him with indifference, and almost with contempt; partly from foolish pride, and partly from timid policy. Yet the celebrated saying of Voltaire, that “Humanity had lost its claims, and that Montesquieu found and restored them,” is the best eulogium ever pronounced
on

on the spirit of laws, and even exceeds the limits of justice. It is only true relatively to France; since, without mentioning the works of Althufius* and some others, the rights of man were reclaimed with more energy and candour in the works of Locke and Sidney, than in those of Montesquieu.

Voltaire often criticised the spirit of laws, but usually with justice. The proof that he was right, in attacking Montesquieu, is that we now perceive the most absurd and fatal prejudices

* A German lawyer, of the XVI. century, who maintained at that time that all power originated in the people.

finding support by quoting works of that celebrated man ; which, had not the progress of knowledge at length broken the fetters forged by the dogmas of authority, concerning questions which ought only to be submitted to the test of reason, would in the present day have done more mischief to France, than they have done good to Europe. The enthusiastic partisans of Montesquieu have affirmed that Voltaire was incapable either of judging or of understanding his works. Irritated by such assertions, he well might mingle a little ill humour with just remark ; in which he would be sanctioned by haughtiness so ridiculous.

The

The fashion of taxing Voltaire with envy was so prevalent, that to this passion have been attributed his sage observations on the work of Helvetius; which, from respect to a persecuted philosopher, he had the delicacy not to publish during the life of that writer. Nay, his very anger at the short lived success of some ill written tragedies was called envy; as if anger could not be felt, except relatively to self, at seeing fame usurped, which is so often fatal to the progress of philosophy and the arts. How much has the praise so prodigally bestowed on Richelieu, Colbert, and other ministers, impeded the advancement of reason, in the science of politics!

While

While we read the works of Voltaire, we perceive no man perhaps ever possessed accuracy of understanding in a superior degree. This he preserved in the enthusiasm of poetry, as well as in the exuberance of humour; this was ever the guide of his taste and of his opinions, and is one of the principal reasons of the inexpressible charms which are discovered, in the perusal of his works. No mind perhaps ever combined more ideas at a time, decided with more rapid sagacity, or displayed more depth, in whatever required a laborious analysis or continued meditation. The strength of his eagle-eye often has astonished even those who
were

were indebted to similar means for ideas the most profound, and combinations the most extensive and precise. In conversation he has often been known to select the best of a multitude of ideas, to arrange them in the most perspicacious and effectual manner, and to clothe them in the most happy and brilliant language.

Hence the inestimable advantage of being ever clear and unaffected without insipidity, and of being read with equal pleasure by the most ignorant, as well as by the most enlightened. Reading his works with reflection, we find in them a multitude of profoundly
philo-

philosophic and true maxims ; which escape superficial readers, because they do not enforce attention, nor require any effort to be understood.

If we consider him as a poet, we shall find that, of the various species which he attempted, the ode and comedy were the only ones in which he did not deserve the highest rank. He failed in comedy because, as it has previously been remarked, he had the gift of seizing the ridiculous of opinion, but not of character, such as could be put in action, and which alone is proper for comedy. Not that, in a country where
the

the mind of man should have freed itself from all its bonds, and in which philosophy should have become popular, absurd and dangerous opinions might not be successfully exhibited on the stage : but this kind of freedom is at present no where to be found.

To him poetry is indebted for the liberty of exercising itself in a field more vast. He has shewn how it may be united with philosophy ; so that poetry, without being deprived of any of its charms, rises to new beauties ; and philosophy, without being dry or inflated, preserves its accuracy and depth.

We

We cannot read his theatrical writings, without observing that to him the tragic art is indebted, for the whole progress which it has made since Racine : nor can even those who refuse him superiority, or equality, of poetical talents, without stupidity or injustice, deny this progress. His latter tragedies prove, that he was far from supposing he had carried this so difficult art to its utmost extent : he was sensible that tragedy might still approach more nearly to nature, without being deprived of its pomp and dignity ; that it still addicted itself too much to local manners ; that the love of women was a too frequent subject ; that their passions

sions ought to be represented on the stage as they exist in life, and their affection first discovered only by the efforts made to conceal it, and not publicly avowed, unless in those moments when excess of danger, or of misfortune, no longer admit of disguise. He thought too that characters void of affectation, great by nature, and strangers to interest and ambition, might afford a source of new beauties, and impart to tragedy more variety and truth. But he became too feeble to execute his own conceptions; and, if we except the father of Irene, we shall find his latter tragedies rather lessons than models.

If,

If, therefore, especially in the arts, the man of genius be he who by enriching them has most extended their limits, who has merited this title more than Voltaire? yet has it been refused him by writers, most of whom were, indeed, too destitute of genius themselves to feel its true characteristics.

To Voltaire we are indebted for having taken a more extensive and useful view of history than the ancients. It has in his writings become, not a narrative of events, not the picture of the revolutions of a nation, but that of human nature, painted from the life, and the philosophic result of the experience

experience of all people, and of all ages. He first introduced true criticism into history; first shewed that the natural probability of accidents ought to be admitted, as proofs for or against historical authenticity; and that the philosophic historian ought, not only to reject miracles, but scrupulously to examine the motives for crediting those facts which depart from the common order of nature.

Perhaps he may occasionally have forgotten the sage rule which he himself invented, and which, rigorously adhered to, may demonstrate truth. Still to him we are indebted for having

freed history from that croud of extraordinary incidents, adopted without proof, which, making the greatest impression on the mind, blinded men to the most natural and the best demonstrated facts. Before his time men knew little of history, except the fables by which it was disfigured. He shewed that the absurdities of polytheism had never been the religion of any but the vulgar, among the greatest nations ; and that the belief of one God, common to all people, had no need of being revealed by supernatural means. He proved that all nations have practised the grand principles of morality, and with increasing purity in proportion as they were more civilized

civilized, and better informed. He taught us that the influence of religion has often corrupted, but never improved morality.

As a philosopher, he was the first to afford an example of a private citizen, who, by his wishes and his endeavours, embraced the general history of man in every country and in every age, opposing error and oppression of every kind, and defending and promulgating every useful truth.

The history of whatever has been done in Europe, in favour of reason and humanity, is the history of his la-

bours and beneficent acts. If the absurd and dangerous custom of interring the dead within the walls of cities, and even in churches, has been abolished in some countries ; if, on the continent of Europe, men, by means of inoculation, have, in part, escaped a disease which threatened life, and often was destructive of happiness ; if the catholic clergy have lost their dangerous power, and will soon be deprived of their scandalous wealth ; if the liberty of the press be increased ; if Sweden, Russia, Poland, Prussia, and the dominions of the house of Austria have beheld the tyranny of intolerance vanish ; if even in France, and some of the provinces

of Italy, it has suffered attacks; if the shameful remains of feudal vassalage has been shaken in Russia, Denmark, Bohemia, and France; if Poland now feels its injustice and danger; if absurd and barbarous laws have been generally abolished, or are threatened with approaching destruction; if the necessity of reforming the administration of public justice be every where felt; if the continent of Europe has been taught that men possess a right to the use of reason; if religious prejudices have been eradicated from the higher classes of society, and in part effaced from the hearts of the common people; if their defenders have been reduced to the

shameful necessity of maintaining their political utility ; if the love of humanity be now the common language of all governments ; if wars should become less frequent, and if the pride of kings, or claims which the rust of time has concealed, be no longer alledged as the pretence for their commencement ; if we have beheld the mask stripped from the face of religious sectaries, who were privileged in imposing on the world ; and if reason for the first time has begun to shed its clear and uniform light over all Europe ; we shall every where discover, in the history of the changes that have been effected, the name of Voltaire ; and shall every
where

where find him beginning the battle, or deciding the victory.

But generally obliged to conceal his intentions, and mask his attacks, though his works are in every hand, the principles of his philosophy are but little known.

Ignorance and error are the sole cause of the misery of man ; and the errors of superstition are the most fatal, because they corrupt every source of reason ; and their destructive enthusiasm teaches their adherents to commit crimes without remorse. That mildness of manners which is compatible with every

form of government diminishes evils, the cure of which reason must one day effect, and impedes their progress. Oppression itself, in a humane nation, assumes the character of the people; and is rarely guilty of great barbarity, in a country where arts and especially literature are beloved. Freedom of thinking is tolerated out of respect to them, though men want the fortitude to love it for its own sake.

Our endeavours, therefore, should be to inspire the mild and consolatory virtues, which lead to reason, which all men may practice, which agree ~~with~~ every polished age, and which
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may teach hypocrisy itself some good. They should particularly be preferred to those austere morals which seldom exist, in common minds, without a mixture of unfeeling severity; which are to hypocrisy at once so easy and so dangerous; which often terrify tyrants but seldom console mankind; and the necessity of which proves the misfortune of those nations whose history they adorn.

By informing mankind, and by rendering them more humane, we best may hope to lead them the surest and easiest road to freedom. But we neither can hope to spread knowledge nor
soften

soften the manners of nations, if frequent wars accustom them to the shedding of blood without remorse, and to condemn the fame which awaits on the arts of peace ; or if, occupied in oppression or in self-defence, men should continue to estimate their virtue by the ill they have been able to do, and imagine the art of killing to be the art of most utility.

The more men are enlightened the more they will be free, and the less difficult will be the attainment of freedom. But let us not teach oppressors to form a league against reason ; let us conceal from them the necessary and
firm

firm union which exists between knowledge and liberty ; and let us not too soon inform them that a nation without prejudice must instantly be free.

If we except theocracies, it is the *immediate interest* of all governments that the people should be humane and enlightened. Let us not teach them that their more *distant interest* is to leave men in a state of ignorance. Let us not oblige them to choose between the interest of pride and that of repose and fame. To induce them to love reason, she must always appear in a gentle and peaceful form ; and, far from terrifying them by imprudent threats, while she

asks

asks their support must offer her own. If we attack oppressors before we have taught the oppressed, we shall risk the loss of liberty and the death of reason. History affords proofs of this truth. How often, in despite of the generous efforts of the friends of freedom, has a single battle reduced nations to the slavery of ages !

And what is the kind of liberty enjoyed by those nations which have recovered it by force of arms, and not by the force of reason ? It has been temporary freedom, and so disturbed by storms that it remains doubtful whether it were or were not an advantage. Have

not

not most of them confounded the forms of republicanism with the enjoyment of right, and the despotism of numbers with freedom. How many unjust laws, contrary to the rights of nature, have dishonoured the code of all nations which have recovered their liberty, during those ages in which reason was still in its childhood !

Why not profit by this fatal experience, and wisely wait the progress of knowledge, in order to obtain freedom more effectual, more substantial, and more peaceful ? Why purchase it by torrents of blood, and inevitable confusion, and give that to chance which
time

time must certainly and without bloodshed bestow ? In order to be more free and to be ever so, we should wait the time when men, released from their prejudices and guided by reason, will be worthy of freedom, because they will know what are its true claims.

What therefore is the duty of a philosopher ? To attack superstition ; to point out peace, wealth, and power to governments, as the infallible rewards of those laws which secure religious liberty ; and to teach them how much they have to fear from priests, whose secret influence will ever menace the repose of nations in which the liberty

berty of the press is under the least restraint. For, previous to the invention of the art of printing, it was impossible to shake off this shameful and fatal yoke: and, till sacerdotal authority shall be entirely annihilated by reason, there will be no medium between absolute ignorance and dangerous commotion.

The philosopher will shew that, without freedom of thought, the spirit of the clergy must again produce assassination, tortures, proscriptions, and civil wars; and that, by enlightening the people only can nations, and kings, be secured from such sacred crimes. He
will

will prove that men who wish for absolute power over the mind will employ force instead of reason, will oblige conscience to cede to their dogmas, and, far from affording morality a more solid basis by combining it with religious notions, will corrupt and destroy it; while they seek, not to promulgate virtue, but, to make their adherents the blind instruments of their ambition and avarice. Should he be asked what is to be the substitute of the prejudices thus destroyed, he would answer—"I have delivered you from a wild beast, which was devouring you, and you ask for a substitute."

Were

Were he to be reproached with repeating the same theme too often, and with too obstinately attacking errors in themselves beneath contempt, he will reply—They are not contemptible while credited by the vulgar. And, though it be less glorious to combat vulgar error than to teach new truths to sages, it is necessary, in order to break the bonds of reason and to open a free road to truth, to prefer utility to fame.

Instead of proving that superstition is the support of despotism, if he write to people under an arbitrary government, he will prove that it is the enemy of kings; and of these two truths

he will purposely dwell upon that which may aid the cause of humanity; and not on that by which it may be injured, because liable to be misunderstood.

Instead of declaring war against despotism, before reason shall have assembled sufficient powers, and calling nations to the banners of freedom, who neither love it nor understand what freedom is, he will enumerate to them and their governors the various oppressions which are common to them all, and which it is as well the interest of those who command as of those who obey to root out. To simplify and humanize the laws, to counteract the oppression of subordinate
 2 tyranny,

tyranny, to break off the shackles with which false policy may have encumbered the industry and liberty of trade, in order that freedom may be the only happiness wanting to mankind, and that nations worthy of freedom may be presented to her, such will be his efforts, such his theme.

Such is the result of the philosophy of Voltaire, and such the spirit which pervades his works.

Let men, who, if he had not written, would still have been the slaves of prejudice, or would have trembled to confess they had shaken of its yoke,

accuse Voltaire of having betrayed the interests of freedom, because he defended it without fanaticism and imprudence ; let them judge him by those enlightened principles which were ten years posterior to his death and half a century to his philosophy, and which, but for him, had ever remained the secret opinions of sages ; let them condemn him for having distinguished between the good, which may exist without liberty, and the happiness to which liberty only gives birth ; let them forbear to perceive that had Voltaire infused into his first writings the principles of freedom of the elder Brutus, or in other words of American independence,

pendence, neither Montesquieu nor Rousseau would have written as they have done ; that if, like the author of the *Système de la Nature*, he had invited the kings of Europe to support the power of the priests*, Europe would still have been superstitious, and would long have remained in bondage ; and let them forget that in books, as in behaviour, we ought to display the courage only which the occasion re-

* The translator speaks from memory, but he believes himself justified in saying that this accusation of the author of the *Système de la Nature* is false, whose doctrine, if he does not grossly mistake, was, that the despotic power of kings and priests was founded in reciprocal support, and that despotism of every kind was equally hateful and destructive.

quires; their injustice will but little injure the glory of Voltaire. Men of genius must be his judges, men who can discover, in a succession of various works, as well from their form and style as from their principles, the secret plan of a philosopher, who is waging continual but bold and artful war on prejudice; rather intent on conquest than on renown; too great to be vain of his opinions, and too much the friend of the human race not to make their utility the grand object of his pursuits.

Voltaire has been accused of partiality to monarchical government, but this
accusation

accusation only can impose on such as have not read his works. It is true he hated, beyond even monarchical power, aristocratic despotism, which unites rigour to hypocrisy and tyranny more austere to morals more perverse; nor was he ever the dupe of the parliaments of France, or the nobles of Sweden and Poland, who give the name of freedom to the chains with which they would load their vassals. In this opinion, Voltaire has been joined by all philosophers who have sought the definition of a free state in the nature and mind of man, and not, like the pedant Mably, in examples, drawn from

the tyrannical anarchies of Italy and Greece.

He has been blamed for having bestowed too much praise on the pomp of the court of Louis XIV. and accusation was in this instance well founded; it was the only prejudice of his youth which he never shook off, and there are few men who can hope they have vanquished all their errors. It has been asserted, that he supposed celebrated artists, orators, and poets, were all that were necessary to render a people happy, but never could he entertain such a thought. He supposed, indeed,

indeed, that arts and literature polished the manners of men, and made the road of reason smooth and safe, and that the love of them rendered those who govern beneficent of heart, often prevented them from committing acts of violence and injustice, and that, under equal circumstances, the most ingenious and polished people would always be the least wretched.

His pious enemies have taxed him with having assaulted, by wilful misquotation, the religion of his country, and extending incredulity even to atheism ; both of which charges are equally false.

false. Among a multitude of objections, founded on proofs and on passages cited from books, supposed to have been inspired by God himself, a very small number of errors only can be discovered; and those cannot be imputed to him as wilful mistakes, because, comparing them to the numerous accurate quotations and facts related with precision, it is evident that nothing could have been of less use to his cause. When contending with his adversaries, his maxim continually was, nothing ought to be credited which is not proved, and every thing should be rejected which is offensive to reason and probability;

bability ; and the answer he has continually received was, whatever cannot be demonstrated an impossibility ought to be adopted and adored.

He constantly appeared to be persuaded of the existence of a Supreme Being, but without remaining blind to the strength of the objections opposed to that opinion. While he thought he beheld the regular order of nature, he could not but perceive those striking irregularities which he was unable to explain.

This was his persuasion, though it was far from that absolute certainty in
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the presence of which all difficulties vanish : the work entitled, *Il faut prendre un parti, ou le principe d'action**, perhaps contains the strongest proofs of the existence of a Supreme Being, which men have yet been able to collect.

He believed as much of free will as ~~rational~~ rational man can believe ; that is, he believed man has the power to resist inclination, and to weigh the motives of action.

His incertitude respecting spirit was almost absolute, and even concerning

* Decide we must, or the principle of action.

the

the existence of the soul after the decease of the body ; but as he imagined this opinion, as well as that of the existence of a God, was beneficial, he rarely allowed himself to mention his doubts, and generally dwelt rather on the proofs than on the objections.

Such was the philosophy of Voltaire ; and we, perhaps, shall find, while we read his life, that he has been more admired than known ; that though gaul abounds in some few of his polemical writings, his predominant sensation was active benevolence ; that his affection for the unfortunate exceeded,

his hatred of his enemies ; and that the passion of fame in him was ever subordinate to the more noble love of humanity. Superior to the ostentation of virtue, or to the concealment of his foibles, which he would sometimes candidly confess, though not proudly proclaim, few men ever existed whose lives have been more honoured by acts of greater worth or less sullied by hypocrisy. In fine, let it be remembered that when, on the pinnacle of fame, after having rendered the French stage illustrious by his genius, and while throughout Europe he exercised a degree of power over the minds of men

hitherto

THE LIFE OF VOLTAIRE.

. Hitherto unparalleled, the following pathetic line,

J'ai fait un peu de bien, c'est mon meilleur ouvrage *.

was the unaffected expression of that habitual benevolence, which had taken possession of his soul.

* The little good I've done, that is my best of works !

END OF THE LIFE OF VOLTAIRE.

